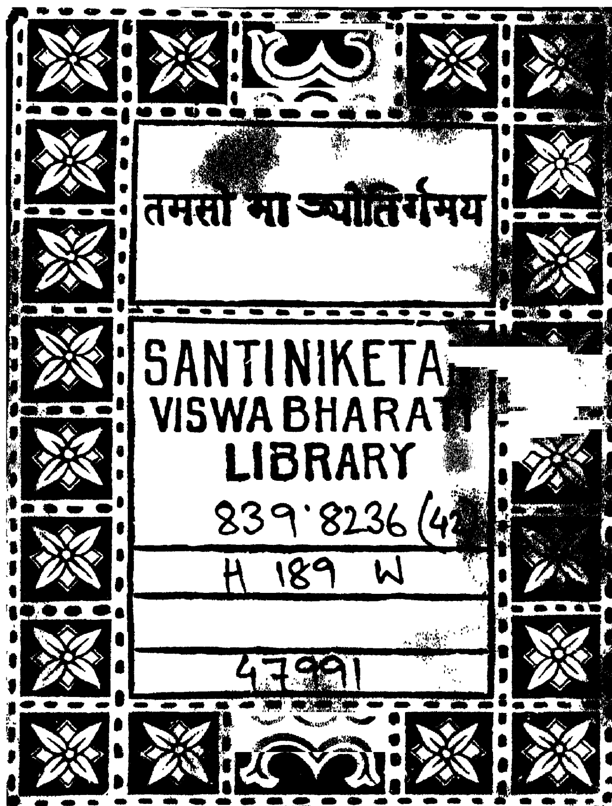

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THE WOMEN AT THE PUMP

THE WORKS OF

KNUT HAMSUN

Winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature 1920

BENONI

ROSA

HUNGER
(Sult)

GROWTH OF THE SOIL
(Markens Gröde)

PAN

SHALLOW SOIL
(Ny Jord)

DREAMERS
(Sværmere)

WANDERERS
(Under Höststjernen and *En Vandrer Spiller med Sordin)*

VICTORIA

CHILDREN OF THE AGE
(Börn av Tiden)

SEGELFOSS TOWN
(Segelfoss By)

IN THE GRIP OF LIFE
(A Play)

MYSTERIES
(Mysterier)

THE WOMEN AT THE PUMP
(Konerne ved Vandposten)

THE WOMEN AT THE PUMP

KNUT HAMSUN

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN
BY ARTHUR G. CHATER



ALFRED · A · KNOPF

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THE WOMEN AT THE PUMP

PEOPLE from the big cities have no idea of standards and proportions in the small towns. They think they can come and take their stand in the market-place and smile and be superior, believe themselves entitled to laugh at the houses and the paving of the streets; that is what they often think. But don't the older inhabitants of the little town remember the time when the houses were yet smaller and the paving yet worse than now? They have seen the town advance. And here at any rate C. A. Johnsen has built himself a mighty house, Johnsen of the Wharfside; a building of some class, with a veranda below and balcony above and carving all round the roof. And many more expensive edifices have grown up, the School, the steamer pier, several business premises, the Custom House, the Savings Bank; it's not a place to smile at. There is even a sort of suburb to the town, where perhaps a score or two of families live on the rocky knolls out by the shipyard; their neat little houses are painted yellow, red or white according to the taste of the owner; they have cost a pretty penny of savings in their time. And for that matter the big cities may have their ups and downs too, such things are not unknown; but did anyone ever hear of Johnsen of the Wharfside being left empty-handed and not knowing where to turn?

So the small town too has its great men, its substantial houses with smart sons and daughters, its immutability and authority. And the small town is taken up with its great ones and follows their doings with interest; after all, the good small-townsfolk have an eye to their own welfare in so doing; they live and thrive in the shadow of the mighty, and so it ought to be. They remember the day when Johnsen of the Wharfside was made Consul; there was wine and cakes for anybody who came into his

shop, and to be sure some of them were shameless enough to call twice and get two drinks.

That same morning Jörgen Fisherman sat in his boat just as to-day, catching fish for a big dinner. It was a day of feasting and rejoicing, the new Consul was still young enough to let himself go; moreover he was so plain and hearty a man as to be fond of wine, women and song; he gave a party and invited the town. Ay, and it all went off splendidly. Folks remember what the paper said about it, the women still talk of it round the pump. Now and then there may be a dispute over some little detail; Lydia says: "Do you think I don't know, when I was helping in the kitchen that day?"—The other woman sticks to her point: "Then go and ask Johnsen himself!"—"Well, *I* don't need to ask anybody," replies a third; "for I've kept the paper at home!"

But it must be six or eight years since the great day.

And Carlsen the blacksmith could remember the day just as well as the women. He was a much respected man; for that matter he was a widower with grown-up children, none of your harum-scarum youngsters—no, he was one who stayed quietly in his smithy and thanked God for this day of festivity just as he gave thanks for all the other days that were vouchsafed to him. That was what he was like, a religious man. Whenever there was any great and joyful event in the town he took care to remind himself that he and his neighbours ought to thank God. He didn't say much about it, and his neighbours wouldn't have paid much attention to him either, but they respected him; they were stiffnecked and ungrateful as ever, but all the same Blacksmith Carlsen was a notable example to the town.

There were many other types and figures in the place: Olaus of the grazing farm, Jörgen Fisherman, Mattis the carpenter, the Doctor, the Postmaster, there were so many of them. Some wear better than others, life leaves no mark on some of them, they can stand a lot. The Postmaster too is religious in his way, so

there's he and Carlsen; but all the rest of the town is worldly and lacking in seriousness. You would think there was no parson in the parish; all he does is to christen, confirm, marry and bury the people; beyond that they have no use for him and you never hear his name.

Oh, that little anthill! All its inhabitants are occupied with their own affairs, they cross each other's paths, push each other aside, sometimes they trample each other under foot. It cannot be otherwise, sometimes they trample each other under foot. . . .

Now Jörgen Fisherman is sitting in his boat, just as he did six or eight years ago, pulling up fish for a big dinner. Though it is Sunday morning he still sits there till he can get a proper boiling to take home. The sea is getting up a little on the other side of the bay, the morning breeze is setting inshore; Jörgen drifts off, he has to be always backing his oars to keep abreast of his marks ashore. No—he gives it up and rows home. He has been sitting out there since two o'clock.

Nobody is up in the town. Jörgen strings his fish on a line and carries them up through the streets. He stumps along in his big boots, a heavy-footed man in his Iceland jacket and sou'wester, but not a big man for all that, rather thin and short below the waist. But Jörgen is tough and indestructible, never ill in bed, never downhearted; he cures a cold by taking no notice of it.

He goes up to C. A. Johnsen's big house, hangs his string of fish on the kitchen door and stumps off home.

Ah, and now there's smoke coming from his chimney, Lydia is up; she has kept an eye on his boat and seen when to put the coffee on. Lydia, that's his wife; she has dark, curly hair and is a cross-tempered person, but uncommonly capable, a woman who can hold her own.

Jörgen stumps in. "Go quietly!" whispers Lydia with suppressed wrath, looking with every sign of terror at the children, the boy and the two girls, who have moved in their sleep. Jörgen

pulls off his boots and his Iceland jacket, drinks his coffee, makes a meal and goes off to the bedroom to sleep. "Don't let the door creak!" hisses Lydia between her teeth.

But then of course the elder of the little girls woke and sat up. That was the usual thing. And then the other little girl woke up beside her. Their mother was furious, she pulled open the bedroom door and shouted to her husband: "There, now you've waked the whole lot for me!" And she shouted so long that she had the boy awake too.

Quick to anger was Lydia, but her wrath never lasted long; while the children began to chatter among themselves she tidied up the room and presently started humming. She opened the bedroom door with the utmost caution and asked: "Oh, then you're not asleep? What was I going to say—you caught a boiling, didn't you? Did you hear what sort of a party they were having?"

"No, they weren't up."

"Well, now you must keep quiet and go to sleep," said Lydia, shutting the door again. And then she made a great racket with the children to get them to be quiet.

She tidied and hummed again, thinking all the time; she was full of the party. In old days they knew how to give parties at Johnsen's on the Wharfside; they got ready for days beforehand and had to have help in the kitchen. Lydia herself used to be sent for; to-day they had not sent for her, perhaps it was not to be a big party; it might be only the son, that Scheldrup Johnsen, who had invited some other young people.

Later in the morning when folks were about it was rumoured that C. A. Johnsen's steamer was to sail to-day. Lydia troubled her head no longer; so it was to be a thumping spread for the captain and the town worthies, but they could manage in the kitchen without her. All right, good luck to them! She dressed the children and wiped their faces and smeared their shoes with grease and soot, and for herself she got out clothes suitable for the occasion.

Afternoon came and a great concourse down on the quay. It was already well on in the spring, so people were dressed accordingly in light, thin clothes, and it was a pretty sight. The *Fia* had finished loading and was ready for sea.

This ship was no longer new, she had been built at the time when a moderate-sized cargo-boat would cost a couple of hundred thousand and no more; now Johnsen of the Wharfside had bought her in Gothenburg, smartened her up and rechristened her *Fia* after his little daughter. What must it have cost to buy a ship like that and clean her up and make her as good as new! It was said that the change of name alone took a lot of money. But what was a lot of money to Johnsen of the Wharfside! And there lay the *Fia*, the town's one steamer and greatest marvel.

Of course little Fia herself was on board when her boat was on the point of sailing; she sat in the cabin with her parents and the captain. And of course her brother, young Scheldrup, came aboard too. He was already a big lad, almost grown up, in a light suit with a black velvet collar to his jacket, as was the fashion of the day. Smart fellow, great style, son of the house of Johnsen, with his father's brown eyes and down on his cheeks. Hats were raised to him and he returned the greetings, so that he walked bareheaded nearly all the way to the cabin.

The ship had steam up and was pouring out smoke. All was calm on deck, mate and crew stood by the rail, spitting into the sea and chatting with their friends ashore. The boy Oliver Andersen knew his place and kept farthest forward; he had been to sea for several years in sailing ships and was a deck hand, an ordinary blue-eyed lad of the people, but a stout fellow withal and a daredevil, son of a widow. He was under the middle height, but wiry and well built; he used to look like the pictures of Napoleon, but now he had grown a beard and had a look of his own. That very year he had seen his way to put a new roof of red tiles on the cottage at home and build on to it at one end. He must have been thinking of the future.

"Ay ay," he said to his mother, the widow, who was standing on the quay with her hands under her shawl; "ay ay, I'll write from the Mediterranean."

Jauntily spoken, like a grown man. And in fact he had plenty of people to talk to ashore, the girls, and Petra whom he was leaving behind. There she stood, engaged to him with a ring on her finger and all.

"And don't forget to water the garden," he went on. But now Oliver was joking, he didn't mean anything by that; all the town knew that he had no garden, but his mother just sowed a few carrots and turnips along the wall of the house. She gave a withered smile, she knew her son, he was not afraid of a joke. Afraid of anything, that boy? She knew nothing but good of her son, he had good gifts and knew how to use them.

The second mate took a turn forward, and no doubt he too had his girl on the quay. "Coil that rope!" he said with an extra note of command in his voice, pointing to a rope's end.

Oliver coiled it. As a matter of fact he was to have gone ashore a minute, half a minute, to hand his girl a screw of raisins he had in his pocket. He wanted to go ashore badly. But at any rate he would make himself heard where he was:

"Carlsen!" he shouted, calling to the blacksmith. "It was a good thing I saw you. I owe you for those clamps for my gutters."

Carlsen felt bashful with everybody's eyes on him and answered: "Never mind, don't trouble now, it's time enough when you come back."

But Oliver had already got out his purse and handed the money over the rail: "That's right, isn't it?" he asked.

Oliver felt pretty big at being so prompt in the sight of a whole multitude. And who was there present to witness his way of doing business? Petra and everybody besides. And there was Lydia too with her children, missing nothing, keen as a razor; her husband Jörgen stood fishing a little way off, but when the town

worthies began to arrive and had to pass his line, he shifted a little farther down the quay and found a safer place.

Now came the great ones, the shipowners, the Doctor, the more considerable among the tradesmen; some were still festive from the Consul's dinner and wore flowers in their button-holes and tall hats. There came Lawyer Fredriksen; the moment had not yet arrived, but Lawyer Fredriksen would watch his chance of saying a few solemn words. He was accustomed to public speaking; it was he who got up meetings in the town and addressed them.

The Johnsen party appeared from the cabin, C. A. Johnsen himself with his lively brown eyes and his prosperous stomach, and Fru Johnsen holding little Fia by the hand. As they left the ship everyone stood aside, not a child got in their way. People who own a steamer are entitled to plenty of room on their own quay, that is only right.

The captain stepped briskly up to the bridge and rang the engine-room telegraph. "Let go there!" The hawsers were hauled aboard. He raised his cap, relations and friends on the quay waved back, the ship quivered and gathered way. At the last moment Oliver threw his packet ashore, and he could see that it hit the mark more or less.

Now the moment had arrived: Lawyer Fredriksen stepped forward, raised his silk hat aloft and invoked good fortune upon ship, owner and crew. Hurrah! from the quay.

And so the *Fia* sailed away to the Mediterranean.

The packet hit its mark indeed, but it was an unwelcome packet and a disgraceful one, for it burst with the impact and the raisins were scattered over the planks of the quay. It was a pretty state of things, Petra smiled with annoyance and was ready to cry, Oliver's mother began to gather up the raisins in her shawl; she had great trouble in keeping off the children and warned them not to trample on God's gifts. The town worthies

and the Johnsen party themselves came past the field of battle, and young Scheldrup Johnsen came past by himself; he smiled and said privately to Petra: "Pick up your raisins!" Petra bent her head, turning red as fire, and must have wished she could sink into the ground. . . .

The women at the pump remembered that day for a long time. They might disagree about this detail or that, but at any rate Fru Johnsen had been in genteel black silk and had worn a fringed shawl over her shoulders. Moreover her hat was one of those with a thin, wide brim which waved up and down as she walked, and in it was a single big feather.

On the other hand no one took any particular notice of what came after, for now life had resumed its daily course. Oliver came home again in the autumn without the *Fia*. Yes, sure enough, he had been badly hurt, nearly killed; he was a cripple. There was no getting away from it. If you fall from the rigging and break your ribs, you may get over it, but at any rate it's a thing that sticks in your memory. But Oliver, he got a barrel of oil on top of him and broke his thigh and injured his groin; he was maimed and got over it. Then he lay in hospital in a little Italian coast town and can't have been properly looked after; his leg had to be taken off. It was seven months before he came home.

Petra, his girl, came out very well and held her head up under this immense trial. She was so out and out ordinary, just like every other girl, but she had her good points too, there's no denying it.

Mattis, the one with the big nose who had been apprenticed to a carpenter and was now working as a journeyman, this man came to Petra and said: "That was a great misfortune!"

"What misfortune?" she asked.

"Oliver coming home like that. Don't you know about it?"

Petra's fidelity was offended: "How shouldn't I know about it? Haven't I had letter after letter?"

"He's been injured," said Mattis.

"Yes," said Petra.

"So now he's one of those who can't keep themselves, let alone others, and what's going to happen?"

Petra answered curtly: "Don't you worry about that!"

She showed no striking marks of sorrow, no self-pity; nay, perhaps she felt no great pity for her lover. "Welcome home!" she said to him.

Oliver himself was silent, but his mother answered:

"Ay, you can see what a state he's come back in."

"Ah, you've got a wooden leg," said Petra.

Oliver looked at the opposite wall and replied: "Of course I have."

His mother added: "And a crutch."

"That's only at first while I'm weak."

"Does it hurt?" asked Petra of his leg.

"Never a bit."

"Well, that's a good thing anyhow!" Petra got up to go, saying: "Well, I thought I'd just look in."

So he didn't get a chance of handing her a couple of presents he had with him, a white figure of an angel and a tray inlaid with fancy woods. Why was she so dry and curt? She must have known that he always brought back something for her from distant lands, and he hadn't forgotten her this time either. As for the wooden leg, no doubt that had made a very unpleasant impression on her, as was only to be expected; but curt and cold—was Petra cold? She was anything but. As Mattis was beginning to say to everyone who would listen: "Petra! I wouldn't have her as a gift. When a girl pants like that and quivers at the nostrils—thanks, not for me!"

Oliver had to start thinking of something to turn his hand to. So long as there was food in the house he ate his meals and grew strong and recovered his powerful chest and shoulders and his vigorous health, but when there was no longer any pay for his mother to draw, a shrinkage of flour and meat set in. Maybe he

was not too old to learn a trade; he might turn watchmaker or tailor, or he might go to the seminary and get trained for schoolmaster. But what was such woman's work for hands like his? And what was his mother to live on while he was learning? Besides, the sea and nothing else was his element.

He was young and had not got used to his sudden helplessness; he sat still most of the time, and when he wanted to move about the room he used his hands and threw himself from chair to chair. He was full of thinking out a new means of livelihood; it was a strange occupation for a born sailor, ay, he sometimes pulled himself up in surprise. He disabled, he a cripple! For the present he would have to get a boat and do a little fishing for the house. He had got a nasty hurt, an absolute and undoubted bodily defect, but after throwing off that gangrened leg and recovering from the effects he was left with a tidy remnant after all, a residue of force.

The fishing did not turn out so very well, a frost set in and the bay was ice-bound right out to the open sea; even the mail boat was not enough to keep the fairway open, but had to butt her way through the ice each time. Oliver might have done as the other fishermen and chopped a hole in the ice to fish through, on foot, ashore so to speak; that was what Jörgen did, and even old Martin of the Heath. But Oliver was too young at the job and besides he didn't care to go to such extremes. Folk mustn't get the idea that he was fishing from necessity, but only for sport, to pass the time.

Serious days came upon them, a downright cheerless Christmas. But at the New Year there was a change in the weather with gales at sea and the ice in the bay broke up again. Oliver rowed out and fished day after day; he stayed away longer and longer, sometimes till late in the evening, and sure enough he brought home fish. But he didn't fish because he had to, far from it!

His mother said casually: "By the by, they were asking me at Johnsen's if you could get them a little fish."

"I?" said Oliver. "Oh, they said that. But I don't fish for other people."

"No, that's what I thought," agreed his mother. She let the matter drop, oh absolutely, as though she thought Johnsen of the Wharfside might catch his own fish. At last she said: "Well, they promised to give a good price."

Silence. Oliver pondered. "That Johnsen of the Wharfside can pay me for my leg first," he said.

All this time Petra had shown herself but rarely; she had been in once or twice, had got her presents, had chatted about things in general and gone away again. She still wore her ring and showed no sign of wanting to break it off, that she did not; but maybe Oliver feared something of the sort in his own heart. All things considered, he was not worth much now, half a man, a sort of deformity who owned nothing, even the clothes on his back were getting worn. You see, he had been too careless while he was at sea, like all the rest, and hadn't put much by. The only thing he had done for the future, and a thing he had been rather proud of before his fall, would perhaps come to nothing now—the addition to the house, the new parlour and bedroom on the other side of the passage. God knows if he would ever have a use for all these glories!

The winter would not come to an end, it got on men's nerves and depressed their spirits.

Petra came in one Sunday afternoon and was far more friendly than her wont. "I caught sight of your mother going into town," she said to Oliver, "so I thought I'd look in and see you."

Oliver guessed something was wrong, his girl was so strange in her manner; she said in a tone of affection: "Poor Oliver!" and hinted that God had visited them both with affliction.

"Yes," Oliver agreed.

"I suppose it was not to be," she murmured with a sigh.

"What do you mean?" he asked at that.

"What do you mean yourself?" she replied.

Then he gave in at once, partly from ancient pride, partly because he saw that after all she was right. It was impossible to shut one's eyes to the state of things.

They talked it over together and she was gentle and forbearing in all she said, but the meaning was plain. "I'm not surprised at you," he said, staring at the floor.

But when it came to going she felt the worst thing of all was before her; she went first to the door, then turned back, went up to him, stroked him on both cheeks and raised his head: "Now you mustn't go against us both and say No. I've been thinking about it. You've not only yourself, but there's your mother. It's not so easy for you."

He looked at her without seeing her meaning; they had already discussed this, he didn't want to hear any more of it. "I know that," he said.

"And you disabled and all—"

"I know that too!" he interrupted angrily.

"No, you're not to be like that, Oliver!" she coaxed him. But when she saw he meant to snap at her again, she frowned back and came straight to the point: "It's no use what you say, it's not so easy for you just now, but I dare say it'll get better. Now I'll put it here, you can turn it into something; it's no use what you say and I'm going to put it here on the table. It's heavy and worth something, I'm sure there's lots of people will buy it."

"What is it? Oh, the ring. Put it there," he said with a nod.

She might have spared herself all this beating about the bush; at the moment he didn't seem to have any objection to taking back the ring, it was worth something anyway. When Petra had gone he tried it on the last joint of his little finger.

But now his feelings came over him: sell it, turn the ring into something? Never. He'd sooner cast it into the deep. He could keep this souvenir through life, he could take it out on Sundays and look at it. As far as that went, it would not be so long before life itself would pass away. . . .

II

AFTER THAT Oliver no longer rowed out every day to fish. Not every day. No doubt this was because the squaring of accounts with Petra had given him a set-back; he put off his work, came to no decision. His mother might ask: "Are you going out to-day? No, I suppose not?" And Oliver would ask in return: "Haven't you any fish left?"—"Oh, it wasn't for that," replied his mother and said no more.

Oh, but she wanted a little flour and one or two other things, soap, coffee, lamp oil, firewood, butter, matches, syrup, nothing but necessaries.

Mattis, the working carpenter, was in full swing building his house, he must have been thinking of the future. Oliver limped off to him one day to have a talk, and he took care to flash the ring on his little finger. There were no old scores between them.

Oliver said: "I had two doors made for my new rooms; it was your master who got them made for me."

"I remember," said Mattis; "it was last winter."

"You might buy those doors off me and put them in here."

"Do you want to sell them?"

"Yes. Because they're no use to me any more. I've altered my mind."

"I remember the doors well enough, it was I myself that made them," said Mattis. "Oh, so you've altered your mind? You're not going to change your condition?"

"Not at present."

"What do you want for the doors?"

They soon came to terms; the doors were second hand and

not even painted, but Oliver had spent locks and hinges on them, so he got his price.

But now Oliver had nothing more to sell, he couldn't sell the staircase. He and his mother lived well for a while on the price of the doors, but spring was coming on again, Oliver was young and his clothes were shabby, he could cut a better figure in new ones, and as he was now a landlubber for good and all he might want a straw hat. His mother regarded the future with more and more misgiving and suggested that perhaps they could have taken lodgers in the new rooms, if only—

Well, Oliver had no objection.

"Yes, but there are no doors now."

After a moment's reflection he replied carelessly: "Doors? Then I can get a couple of doors made."

His mother shook her head: "There's no stove either."

"Stove? What do they want with a stove in summer-time?" he asked.

No, Oliver had had a shock right enough, his head wasn't what it used to be.

He dragged himself over to Mattis again and had a long talk with him, and then he said: "Well, you're building a house and painting it and putting in doors and windows, so I suppose you're thinking of changing your condition?"

"I don't know what to say to that," said Mattis. "But I can't say I've exactly put it out of my mind."

"I guessed that!" Oliver nodded and looked on while the carpenter worked. Still there was no grudge between them. "And whoever it is or whoever it may be, she'll be well off with you. What was I going to say—have you bought a gold ring?"

"Gold ring? No."

"Oh. Well, when that day comes I have one."

"Let me see it," said Mattis. "But I suppose there's your name inside it?"

"Yes. But you can get that scratched out."

Mattis looked at the ring and weighed it in his hand and valued it. The end of it was that he bought it. "If only it'll fit," he said.

Oliver answered significantly: "That's the least thing I'm afraid of. Because I understand."

Mattis gave him a quick glance and said: "Well, what do you say to it?"

"What I say?" answered Oliver. "It's not my business any more. There'll be a chance for me too, I'm not dead yet."

"No, that's sure," said Mattis, agreeing with him.

"Well, what do you think?" asked Oliver, flattered. "Isn't there a chance for me?"

"You're only joking, Oliver; you have as good a chance as I have."

Mattis was obviously relieved. They talked together in flattering tones, without shyness, but also without familiarity.

"How did it happen when you got hurt?" asked Mattis. "Did you fall from aloft?"

"I?" cried Oliver, scandalized. "I've been rather too long at sea to fall."

"That's what I thought."

"No, it was a sea."

"I bet it was something like a sea if it did for you?"

"Pretty near the crack of doom it was," replied Oliver boastingly. "Carried away the deck cargo, sent a barrel of oil bang up against me; it came at me through the air, just like a cannon-ball."

"Right through the air!"

"And then I heard a yell from the others."

"Didn't you yell yourself?"

"What should I yell for? What was the use of that?"

Mattis smiled and shook his head, saying: "Ah, you're the one!"

Oh, Mattis was obviously relieved, it was a pleasure to have

to deal with Oliver. Could anybody be more accommodating than this man? Half of him missing from the waist down, but a Napoleon with what was left! Put him in a carriage with the apron drawn up and there was nothing wrong with him. . . .

Once more Oliver and his mother lived well for a while; he fished a little too, so that they had fish for themselves and the cat; the ring gave them flour and lamp oil. But now Oliver had nothing more to sell, he couldn't sell the chimney-pot off the roof.

His mother's spirits were sinking, this could not go on! She began to hint that something would have to be done; after a while she ventured to show signs of discontent. The cupboard was empty. "You could surely make nets, can't you make nets?" she asked. But Oliver could do nothing, had learnt nothing, cared to learn nothing; he had gone to sea when he might have learnt things.

"I don't know what to do for a porridge stick," said his mother. "You could make me a porridge stick if you were clever with your hands."

Oliver could only regard this as uncalled-for nagging on his mother's part and answered: "Wouldn't you like to see me knitting mittens?"

He reflected, he pondered many reasons for and against; something would have to be done, that was sure. He got no further than pondering.

No more could be raised on the cottage than had been done already, it was mortgaged of old to Lawyer Fredriksen. True, nothing had been borrowed on the additions, and immediately on his return Oliver had applied to Fredriksen for a fresh loan on these, but had been refused. Additions? Fredriksen would only have it that they were the regular upkeep of the house. "And the new tiled roof?" said Oliver. "Upkeep!" said Fredriksen. When Oliver suggested that he might borrow elsewhere on the additions the lawyer threatened to call in his loan and

put the house up to auction at once. They talked this way and that, and the lawyer asked in surprise: "Are you really reduced to this?"—"I?" said Oliver, looking big. "No, that's what I thought," said the lawyer. And as it was only the additions and the new roof that gave him a reasonable security for his money, he made Oliver sign a declaration that everything new about the house was included in the mortgage—would he do that as an honest man? Oliver, just come home, accustomed to open-handed dealings in sea ports, easy-going too by nature—Oliver signed. He parted from the lawyer in all friendliness.

That was how it was then.

He often regretted that piece of folly, but there was no way of getting out of it. Or was there? Could he sell the house straight away, pay off Lawyer Fredriksen and be quit of him? Would the money go far enough? The only thing certain was that at any rate he would find himself homeless.

Oliver pondered many questions and reflected. Sometimes he pondered whether he couldn't turn religious and perhaps be given a little cart to go about and visit the chapel folk.

His mother had scraps of news to tell him, she heard more than he did of what was going on, caught a word or two in the street and at the pump, gossip, happenings, truth and lies, she stored it all up and took it home. Sometimes it just stayed in her head and came to nothing, but occasionally some little chance fact turned out useful. As when she told Oliver about Adolf, the son of Blacksmith Carlsen, a lad they knew who had just signed on to go to sea.

"What's his ship?" asked Oliver.

"Heiberg's barque. They said he was seeing about getting his chest made."

After a while Oliver nodded and said: "He can buy my chest."

"That too!" sighed his mother.

"What do I want with it? I sailed it out and sailed it home

time after time, and there it stands. No, you just get Adolf to buy the chest, I can't bear the sight of it!"

He was pretty sure that Adolf would want to have the chest, it had made many a voyage and was used to the sea, an old sea chest would bring luck. For every time Oliver was going to sea he had positively yearned for his chest. It wasn't alive, of course, but for all that it was a companion, a servant, oh, a dear friend. But let it go and good luck to it! On the last trip home from Italy it had been a great nuisance, as he was a cripple and couldn't handle it any more; and on the railway he had had to pay overweight on it. It was almost as if it took the bread out of his mouth and fed on him, the monster—out with it!

Oh, but Oliver was not so indifferent when his mother brought in Adolf. There stood his sea chest, heavy and ugly if you like, but useful. It had been subjected to kicks and bumps and there were many scars in its green paint; he had even cut tobacco on the lid of it, but my word, what a piece of work that chest was all the same!

"You can see what she's like," said Oliver to Adolf. "She never gave a damn for captains, brokers or consuls, she's always stood in her place and never shifted except she was forced."

Adolf bought the chest and sat down to listen to Oliver's words of wisdom. The ex-sailor had a lot to tell the boy about the life that awaited him. Oh yes, a free and healthy life, but nothing to boast of in some ways. Ungodliness and vice and plenty of shore leaves in foreign towns and countries. Not but what he himself had been lucky enough to find nice sweethearts in every port, he bragged; but he hadn't always come off without a row. But the only thing to do was to clap one hand on the fellow's neck and the other on the seat of his pants and make a hole in the window with him—one, two, three, out into the gutter! Oh, one hadn't always been a cripple, tied to a chair!

Oliver grew philosophical, his sailor's talk was idle and ordinary, neither better nor worse than other sailors' truth and bravado, bragging, godliness and white lies. He enlarged on the temptations of the life, introduced English words, warned against drink: "Now you see, Adolf, the state I came home in. It's scarcely to be believed. But do you think it was the result of drink and evil living? As sober as you are now! Bless you, it was in the open sea, and what had I done? Therefore you must never give way to drunkenness as so many of them do, and then let the Lord do with you as he will, it won't be your fault! And if they see you have money on you, pulling English sovereigns out of your pocket, they'll be on to you like gulls after herring; you must have an inner pocket made in your waistcoat before you sail."

"Did you have one?" interrupted his mother.

"Did I not!" Oliver unbuttoned his waistcoat and there was no inner pocket. "It must be in my other clothes, my shore-going clothes," he said.

"Shore-going clothes?" queried his mother.

Oliver ignored her and went on: "Anyhow young Adolf is to take a lesson from what's right and not from what's wrong. Yes, you just remember what I've been saying, Adolf, and keep your mind on God when you're on night watch and standing at the wheel. And then you'll learn to talk English and be able to say what you want to say wherever you may be in all parts of the world. They'll understand you, whether you go into a saloon and ask for a glass of beer, or whether you go to church or to the consulate. But take my chest now and deal with it like an honest man, that's what it's been used to."

"What were those shore-going clothes you were talking about?" his mother asked again. "Have you any clothes besides what you're sitting in?"

"Any clothes indeed!" replied Oliver. "They're coming from Italy. What nonsense are you talking?"

But his mother was bolder when there was a third person present, she only gave a snort. Oh, the cupboard had got so empty.

Now Oliver had nothing more to sell, his sea chest was the end and there was nothing for new clothes and straw hat. But the days went by, one after another and one day he seemed to wake up and actually hinted at getting rid of the boat.

"The boat!" cried his mother.

He checked himself and turned it off: No, there was no boat to sell, he wouldn't get anything for it, it was an old tub that only hung together by the tar inside, he'd paid very little for it himself.

"I shall have to try and row out myself," his mother threatened. "For you've given it up."

And with the most complete indifference and scorn for his mother's words Oliver took his crutch and hobbled out into the street.

Fine weather; he sniffed the smell of the sea. A flock of pigeons whirred down into the street, some children were skipping with a rope. Once upon a time he had skipped.

He began calling at the shops. "You are a stranger!" they said everywhere, kind and helpful, and gave the cripple something to sit on. He had to tell the story of his accident time after time; he got practised in it and embroidered it more and more, with interesting additions about his time at the hospital, for none of his shipmates from the *Fia* could come home and correct him there. One of the nurses would have had no objection to marrying him—

Well, why didn't he take her?

"Do you think I could go and turn Catholic!"

But by degrees they left off making so much of him in the shops, the novelty had worn off, he had to find a box to sit on for himself or else stand and prop his elbows on the counter. And nobody asked about the nurse any more.

This went on for a while and then his visits to the shops came to an end of their own accord; he started a little fishing again. Johnsen of the Wharfside had asked him personally to sell him what he could spare of his catch. Yes, replied Oliver, to avoid saying No outright. That Johnsen of the Wharfside knew what he was about; he was a shipowner who had got a member of his crew sent home disabled; he could still make use of him in a boat. But no, thanks, Oliver ate his fish himself!

He met Jorgen Fisherman out on the water and they laid their boats alongside and had a chat. What was there for them to chat about anyway? The weather, the fishing and what they made out of it. Jorgen was a hard worker.

"You lie here in the bay," said Oliver, "but if I had a good boat like yours I should go farther out. How much can you earn in a day?"

It varied so much. There were good and bad days, sometimes it was a lot. sometimes very poor.

"No, I'll tell you what, Jorgen; you lie here in the bay just like us who are fishing for sport. Well, I don't count myself, because I'm a broken man and no good for anything. But supposing you lay out at sea you'd get halibut and big fish."

Yes, Jorgen agreed, he might get whale.

They both laughed, for after all Oliver was only joking and talking nonsense about going to sea. Jorgen hadn't the boat or the gear for that, and he was only one man.

"Supposing we joined together and got a sea-going boat," said Oliver, still in fun.

Like all the rest Jorgen had patience with the cripple and discussed all sorts of ideas with him: a sea-going boat, ay, and a big outfit, deep-sea lines; they might have the fish market all to themselves. It was Oliver who had the ideas, they occurred to him on the spur of the moment and weren't worth much, he had been in foreign lands and had seen and heard wonderful

things, he had brains in his head.—"Here I am talking," he said, "but I suppose the end of it will be that I'll have to try for the lighthouse service."

"Ay," Jörgen agreed; "you might do worse."

"I don't know. A broken man must do something."

"See to the lamp, keep the log, guide seafaring men on dark nights. If you had somebody to put in a word for you."

"I'm sure I can get Johnsen of the Wharfside to put in a word for me. Well, shan't we row home?"

"No, I must stop a bit longer; I promised the judge a boiling and I've only got a few."

"What does the judge pay you for a boiling?"

Jörgen mentioned an average price.

Oliver shook his head at the poorness of it and rowed away; he too started fishing again. He sat there another half hour, then rowed home with what he had caught.

He rowed like a man. It may be he wanted to show off and surprise Jörgen Fisherman with what he could do, and he succeeded. The truth was, Oliver was made, or remade, for a life in a fishing boat; he managed the oars like a heavy weight that swung backwards and forwards, he had all the limbs that were wanted. And it may be that this truth dawned on him after a few days; Oliver grew industrious, he went out in the morning and fished all day, he rowed farther and farther out and found new fishing grounds, he came home with two or three strings of fish in the day and sold a good deal in the town. He saved the money.

"You row like a steamer," said Jörgen Fisherman. And he heard the same from Martin of the Heath, who was the oldest fisherman in the place.

"Do you think so? Oh well; you see, I've sailed all the seas and I've seen a few things."

To this Jörgen replied with his usual adage: that Nature had many secrets from which we might take a lesson.

"It's a good thing I can use the oars," said Oliver; "I've thought of making a long trip one of these days."

Oliver didn't say where he meant to go; it was not altogether a lawful business he was thinking of—collecting eggs on the islands. Perhaps he could bring back a little driftwood for the house at the same time. It was a double speculation. And the lawful search for driftwood was intended to cover the unlawful egg-collecting.

III

NO, JÖRGEN FISHERMAN was nothing of a speculator; he was a fisherman and he had got on by making small money and cutting his cloth accordingly. He owned his house and a little more, his three children were fat and fine, Jörgen was doing well in every way.

Lydia for her part was excitable and hot-tempered, but she was capable, ho, a regular rasp and a razor, a saw, a plane and a scrubbing-brush if you like, but indispensable to her husband and children. Folks watched their chance of getting a rise out of her; her vanity was great, she was so genteel that she made herself ridiculous, her children were better dressed than anyone else's and she herself was smarter than all the neighbours. It was a way she had got into in her unmarried days, she had served in none but the best houses, first with Trader Heiberg, and then for many years with Johnsen of the Wharfside while she was young, so didn't she belong to the better class? Hadn't C. A. Johnsen himself cast his eye on her in her younger days? She remembered that so well; he got nothing out of her, no, but that wasn't his fault.

Then she made Jörgen's acquaintance, and she dragged it out for four years, but married him at last. He was not exactly picturesque to the eye, but his face was harmless, with small, ordinary features, and his soft, dark beard even gave him a sort of distinction. The worst thing about him was that he was heavy on his feet, he was no dancing man, everybody could hear him come and go, nor did his sedentary life in the boat tend to make him more active on his legs. But Jörgen was a steady, honest man; Lydia never had a day's regret that she had accepted him.

Jörgen was a worker, he went so far as to worry and fret when the weather kept him at home. He found the spring and early summer a dreary time with all the endless holidays to get through; Easter and Whitsuntide were a real trial. He might have borne it if he hadn't had a ready sale for his fish, but small as it was the town suffered from a constant shortage and the price of fish went up year by year. Oliver might snort as much as he liked at the earnings, but fishing on a small scale was a good livelihood, an excellent livelihood. And besides, Jörgen had read in the paper that the fisherman's calling was of the same beneficent nature as the farmer's ashore, that it was a gathering of the harvest. He too was in the service of the soil.

But now he was on the beach. At last there was an end of the great holidays and Ascension Day and the Seventeenth of May [1] and Prayer Day, but God had raised storms at sea, God required a three weeks' pause in the gathering of the sea harvest, whatever might be the sense of that. Jörgen strolled about leading his little boy by the hand, they got wet through in the rain, they climbed on to high ground and looked at the sea and counted the steamers outside, they came down again and looked at the boat, to see if she lay securely and if she wanted baling out. Jörgen was very unhappy in his idleness.

He met Oliver. They had nothing else to do and could sit down in a sheltered place and chat. Oliver was not worrying, he was physically well, the bad weather gave him an excuse for doing nothing, his industrious fit had passed off. It was like a dispensation of Providence: no sooner had he made up his mind to earn money for new clothes and actually begun to get a taste for his work than there came this long storm-bound spell and his good resolutions dribbled away. The only thing that annoyed him now was that he had not made that long trip he

[1] May 17 is Norwegian Independence Day. "Prayer Day" (*Bededag*) was instituted in 1682 as an annual day of humiliation, to be held on the Friday in the fourth week after Easter.—Tr.

talked about; he was forced day after day to go home and wrangle with his mother.

He was becoming such a fellow for philosophizing. He was young, and at times he would hold forth violently and obtrusively on his own existence. Look here, was everything so charmingly and ornamentally ordained as we were taught in Holy Writ? There was Olaus the grazier who got his face blown blue one year from a blasting charge. Next year when he had found work in the shipyard a winch came and tore his hand off. Now he drank like a fish and fought with his wife.—"Take anyone you like, Jörgen, we may all be changed and corrupted by misfortune, however much we may call ourselves God's creatures."

"Ay," said Jörgen.

"Well, isn't it true? Supposing you're the most blameless soul alive and get a cannon-ball in your loins, it doesn't make you any better. It makes you far from better. Perhaps you think it makes you better?"

"It's what you may call a chastening," said Jörgen meekly.

"Oh, you're a sheep. Chastening? You can tell yourself that when you come in for a Doomsday crack like I got."—Oliver had suddenly gone white with fury, but when Jörgen looked like going he repented his wrath and felt in his pocket for his pipe: "Would you like to have this? I meant it for you."

"Have you stopped smoking?"

"Long ago. Ever since the hospital. I bought it abroad one time. So if you'll have it—"

"No. You keep it."

They went towards home.

"Oh, you needn't trouble to hang your head and look pious, Jörgen. You needn't trouble, I say," said Oliver in a fresh blaze of anger. "I don't care what you say, you've got your trials and I've got mine. See here, for instance, you can't go out to sea. Is that because you're so rich and full of money that you can't carry any more? I tell you, he's pretty close in his

reckoning, the Lord is, it's almost as if he stole from you."

Jörgen knitted his brows and opened his lips as though to answer, and for the moment this gave even him some resemblance to an excitable person. But it went no further, he said not a word.

Oliver subsided and changed his tone again: "But all things are in his hand, I know that well enough. And if we try to walk according to his precepts we can't help what comes. Won't you have the pipe?"

Jörgen squirmed and answered: "You mustn't give it away." But when he saw the supplication in the cripple's look he changed his mind and said: "Why am I to have this expensive pipe?"

"You're to have it!" declared Oliver. "I meant it for you, I was thinking of you all the time. You'll often have a chance of doing something for me in return, and I know you'll do it."

And in fact the house of Oliver had several times applied for help to obliging neighbours of late. Oliver himself had kept in the background, but his mother went out in the evening when the shops were shut and borrowed a cupful of coffee berries or a soup plate of rye meal "till to-morrow." What couldn't the old woman borrow?—one evening she had to borrow a codling of Martin Fisherman.

She had constant wrangles with her son. "But what in the world did you do with the money you earned before the bad weather?" she asked.

"Wouldn't you like to know!" he replied.

But his mother was persistent, she didn't give in till she had him well riled, and one day he came and dashed the money down on the table; all he had got out of it was a blue necktie. Oh, it wasn't much after all, a few savings painfully scraped together fish by fish; but much or little, it was money for clothes and straw hat; good-bye to them now. Of course he wouldn't have handed it over if God hadn't interfered with his storms and checked his good resolutions; let it all go! He put on a bold

face and said to his mother: "Now you can leave me in peace a good while!"

His mother was not overwhelmed. "So that was all! Ay, you shall be left in peace, that you shall!" she said. "But if I'm to pay what we owe this won't go far."

Then at last he came out with something that had long been smouldering in his head: "I'm not afraid for myself, you needn't think that. If you can get on, so can I."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"What do I mean? I mean just exactly that I'm a broken man and haven't the use of my limbs. Have you no eyes in your head?"

"Am I to go on the parish?" she asked, scandalized.

"On the parish exactly—no. But can't you get a trifle of relief?"

"Oh!" she answered, shutting her lips tightly.

"Do you think that's so impossible? Broken man as I am."

"Broken?" she cried furiously. "I'll tell you what—you don't want to do anything, you won't turn your hand to a blessed thing. Why weren't you watching your chance yesterday when it was fair weather? To-day it's squally again."

"It was pretty squally yesterday too."

"Oh. But can you tell me why Jörgen was out?"

"Was Jörgen out? It's all right for Jörgen, he has a good new boat," sighed Oliver.

Silence. But his mother was well worked up and did not conceal it. "You sell the doors off the house," she said; "it's a wonder you don't sell the walls! I wish I was lying under the sod!"

"Ay, and what about me?"

"You!" she sniffed. "No, you'd lie in your bed, you would. And I'm certain that if I started getting relief I'd have to feed you too."

Then Oliver broke into a loud laugh at his mother's preposter-

ous language. "No, now you can stop! Ha-ha-ha, now by the Lord you can talk the rest to yourself!"

After a while there was once more no fish to the potatoes and no wood for the stove. There had been a smooth day now and again, but Oliver was not watching and the next day the water was rough again, in fact the weather seemed to get worse instead of better. What was the meaning of it all? There was no mercy in Heaven, never had the thunder crashed so loudly over the town.

Oliver threw himself from chair to chair indoors and lay dozing by the hour over the table with his face in his arms. Now and again he would make a lunge at the cat with his wooden leg. One day he got up on to the roof. Oh, Oliver was an old sailor, he wanted to go aloft again; he fussed with the lightning-conductor, put a few tiles straight and came down again.

He was now in deep distress, regular meals were a thing of the past. One day his mother went out and did not come back all day; as she didn't come back the next day either Oliver went to a man whose business it was and said: "You must do me a charity and come and look at my lightning-rod. I'm afraid I damaged it when I was repairing the tiles."—"Do you think there's any hurry?" asked the man.—"You might have said you'd come with me straight away," replied Oliver. "Seeing that there's a storm coming and I'm afraid of the lightning."

The man went with him; like all the rest he had to show kindness to the cripple.

The man went up to the roof and Oliver stood below. The man called down to him: "Ah, if you'd had an accident here you'd only have had yourself to thank for it!"

"How's that?"

"Why, bless you, the wire's off. It goes to the roof and then stops. It's calling the lightning right down into your kitchen stove."

"I'm just thinking," said Oliver, "it's a good thing Mother's

been away on a visit all this time. I'd have been the only one to suffer."

The man fitted a new rod and when he had finished Oliver asked what it cost.—"Nothing."—"Oh, but I want to pay."—"Well, you can let it be for the present. If you have a codling to spare one day you can give it me."—"You shall have a whole string!" said Oliver.

Oh, Oliver talked loud and freely, he wanted to be heard by someone who was going past, by Petra who was going past. She was to hear that he had not only offered to pay but to pay handsomely. There was Petra sure enough, she must be going across to Mattis's new house, to her own new house. Oliver was left staring at her. He ought anyhow to have had a new straw hat to take off to her. He had nothing.

His mother did not come back, whatever she had done with herself; maybe she had really gone on the parish. Oliver resumed his visits to the shops; they had not seen him for a while, once more he was given a box to drop on to and now and then a ship's biscuit to chew. Why yes, he ate the hard tack for fun, pure joke, nobody could be surprised, the old sailor still had a taste for ship's fare and he had splendid teeth.

When he had been all round the shops he extended his circuit, he went up on to the Heath and got a cup of coffee and bread with it at Martin's. They had a chat about the weather and Oliver told the womenfolk about his time at the hospital and about the nurse: a nice fool he had been not to take her, he said. But the thing was that we would all prefer to live and die in the religion we'd been brought up in. And besides, at that time he had had a girl at home here whom he believed in.—"Is it all over between you and Petra?" the women asked.—"You're not to mention her name," he replied.

He hobbled over to a new house that was being fitted up and sat down there for another chat: ay, it cost some money to build, no doubt about that. Not so much the house itself, but the win-

dows and doors took your breath away, they were so mortal dear. If they'd like to buy a couple of doors he had some extra fine ones.

From the Heath Oliver made his way to Mattis. The carpenter was at work as usual, but stopped his planing to clear a seat for the cripple. They talked of the long spell of bad weather on land and sea, a poor man hadn't a chance to make a living. But it was the same for all, Jörgen Fisherman and Martin of the Heath didn't get out either.

"If I'd had my pipe I'd have given it you," said Oliver.

"No, you shouldn't have done that."

"Straight away! But that Jörgen got it."

"Ah, so that Jörgen got it?"

"Brand-new pipe. I bought it abroad somewhere. What was I going to say—how soon will you be changing your condition?"

"Well, you know," replied Mattis, with a touch of bashfulness, "it won't be just yet awhile."

"Ah!" said Oliver, making the best of the answer. Oh, Oliver could be enormously patient and reasonable, he accepted the inevitable. The carpenter felt pity for him, he was a Napoleon after all. There sat Oliver looking at the floor and he must have had a melancholy quarter of an hour, his eyes were almost closed. But all at once the calm surface was broken by a ripple; he was still looking at the floor, but he pointed with his crutch and said: "I want those doors back."

Mattis stood agape and asked: "What?"

"I want those doors back."

"The doors? Ah."

Oliver slowly raised his eyes and said: "You can *give* me them back."

They stared at each other.

"I'll see and find time to make you a pair of doors," said Mattis.

"No," Oliver returned; "those doors or none!"

Was it a threat? Oliver got up and stood erect, ay, he used his crutch simply as a walking-stick, a domineering spirit had come upon him. Now this kind of thing was calculated to bring some confusion into the carpenter's view of the cripple; Mattis looked as if he didn't exactly understand it all, his big nose seemed to grow longer than ever. Evidently he did not feel sure of his ground.

"Well, you can have the doors," he said.

"You're doing me a charity," Oliver then said. He left Mattis in a queer state of mind and went home.

Then there was more sitting at the table and dozing, giving the cat a kick now and again and keeping an eye on the lifeless street. Those were long days. The doors had just come back and stood in the passage, they had not been hung again, but there they were all ready, Mattis himself had carried them here on his head, one door after the other. The carpenter was rather taciturn in his manner, which was not to be wondered at. Oliver said: "Why, what a marvellous strong man you are, Mattis!"

Soon after his mother came home again. She walked in without a greeting or offering her hand, but her look was not unfriendly. "Have you got the doors back?" she said and seemed to find things more cosy already.

"Where have you been?" asked her son.

"Oh, I've just been for a little trip."

"Well, you see," said Oliver, "even if you are away I can get a thing or two for the house. Now I've got the doors."

"You can please yourself whether you want doors in the house or not," said his mother, pursing her mouth.

"Oh, you don't care what the place looks like! Well, you can get Old Harry to find the next doors for you!"

Oliver got up, seized his crutch and hobbled out quickly. Oh, he wasn't going to lose the chance of getting properly mad. He made his way up to the Heath, back to the new house. While he was out his mother made a meal; the old woman had a good

supply of food hidden under her shawl when she came home; waffles, black pudding, bloaters, eggs, bacon and bread. She packed it all up again carefully and stowed it at the bottom of her bed.

When Oliver came back he had a man with him. The man took a door and carried it away on his head. Mother and son said not a word to each other. The man came back for the other door and carried that away too; he went in the direction of the new house. Now perhaps Oliver thought he had gone rather far, he wanted to stop his mother's mouth and said: "When you have to buy a door it costs your life-blood, but when you come to sell it again you can't get the price of a decent meal for it."

"You haven't gone and sold the doors again, have you?"

"What do I want with them?" cried Oliver. "And anyhow you didn't care for them either."

"Well, God preserve me from you!" exclaimed his mother.

At first he looked as if he would flare up again and put all the blame on her; he stalked about the room with unnecessary haste, stamping his wooden leg on the floor. Oh well, he'd better keep his wits about him as he had them: "Here's the money for the doors!" he said, laying it on the table. "You can take the lot."

Again his mother did not seem overwhelmed, she eyed the money askance and gave a little cast of the head.

Oliver was offended: "What—perhaps you think I've drunk up the rest? I've kept back a trifle for the long trip."

"What long trip?"

"And when I'm going on a long trip I must have a trifle to buy provisions."

"Yes, it's just the weather for a long trip!" said his mother incredulously.

"It's moderating now, the wind's changed. But anyhow," he muttered—still the man who had his wits about him and had to use them—"anyhow I'm not going to squabble with you!"

"Oh," replied his mother, hurt.

"No. For whatever I do is wrong."

Deuce take Oliver if he wasn't the injured party in this business of the doors!

IV

AND AT last there came a day's fine weather, followed by another; it looked as if it would last. Oliver went to Jörgen Fisherman and said: "Well, now you must do a good deed and change boats with me to-morrow."

"Eh, what for?"

"I'm going to make a trip a long way out and I can't trust myself in my own boat. Ah, you're smoking the pipe, I see. How do you find it?"

"The pipe's good enough."

"Well you just smoke it; you're to have it, you know."

Lydia offered him coffee, but he had some coppers in his pocket and could afford to refuse it: "I had a cup just before I left home. Well, what do you say, Jörgen, will you do me this turn?"

Jörgen had no choice; he answered: "I'll have to do it. But you must take good care of the boat."

So Oliver went off on his long trip.

What happened now is remembered by the older generation to this day, it was no small matter: Oliver didn't get wrecked or come to any fresh harm; he came home with a ship, a disabled vessel, and claimed salvage. He was not alone in it, the profits would have to be shared: when he found the ship drifting lifelessly outside the islands, abandoned by her crew, he had to row to the nearest land to get help; but Oliver was the discoverer and he was the practised seaman who could take charge of the salvaging. He went to work with the pumps, he took in the shreds of sail and the dangling cordage, then he set the men to tow her and took the wheel himself. Nobody could see that he was a cripple now.

If only he could have brought a cargo of coffee into port! It was not so good as that; the derelict carried bricks, was ballasted so to speak with bricks, she was a Dane and perhaps was only bound for the nearest market town with these bricks and was then blown out to sea in a terrific gale. The old tub was not worth much, but there she was, a find and a gift, battered about, of course, with no boats, nothing ornamental, a stinking old packet, but by no means a wreck. The vessel must have lain at sea all through the bad weather; her crew seemed to have deserted her owing to shortage of provisions, there was hardly any food aboard.

Now this strange sight came in view, and the whole town gazed with curiosity over the smooth surface of its bay. What was it? A sort of procession, tug-boat and ship, with another boat towed aft. People drifted down to the quay. Jörgen came and recognized his boat; the ship was a stranger, but Oliver was on board.

He stood stiff and square on deck and didn't overdo it with shouting, but just gave a brief word of command to the two fishermen he had brought to help him. Then he sent a message ashore for the Consul. Jörgen modestly called up to him asking what ship it was, but was given no answer, Oliver had so much to attend to. Olaus the grazier, who was a loose-mouthed fellow and always loafing about the quay, declared aloud: "He's stolen the packet!"

Oliver was very indignant that the Consul did not come himself but sent his son, young Scheldrup. "Where's your father?" asked Oliver.

"My father? What ship is that?"

"Go and fetch your father. I promise you he'll have to write a report and seal up everything on board!"

"What ship is that, I want to know?"

Oliver called to some small boys on the quay to fetch the Consul, and only when they had gone would he turn to young

Scheldrup and explain: "You see, this is a Dane and a foreigner from what I can see."

The Consul arrived, C. A. Johnsen himself, and the crowd made way for him. He came with some hesitation, for he was not a man everybody could send for, but he had a first-rate brain and quickly took it all in, a couple of questions were enough for him. "I've brought you a strange visitor!" Oliver remarked. The Consul cast his brown eyes upon the vessel and was not impressed, it was no steamer, it was not his own *Fia*. He sent young Scheldrup for writing materials and then went aboard and drew up a report.

It took an hour, but the crowd waited. Half the town had come down to the quay, Petra had come, Lawyer Fredriksen had come; he asked: "Who is the hero, who has salved the ship?" Young Scheldrup indulged in a joke and replied: "Oliver—in case you want to make a speech!" Young Scheldrup joked with Petra too; that boy was getting a little too grown up. "To my mind this is a seamanlike deed," said Lawyer Fredriksen.

So it was, a seamanlike deed; it got Oliver's name into the paper and people talked about it. Oliver himself made no great fuss about the adventure; he had to explain all the details to the landlubbers, but did not put on side or make a fool of himself by aping the town worthies. Naturally Oliver was extremely pleased with his heroic achievement, he went at once and bespoke new clothes, as he had a good right to do; silks and velvets were not for him, but no one could grudge him a sailor's blue serge. "How did it happen?" he answered the landlubbers. "Just the same as if you walked along the street and found a gold ring and picked it up!" And then they all laughed at his waggishness: it couldn't be so easy as that to perform a seamanlike deed! He was like a king who stepped down among his people and allowed himself to be approached; oh, he did not ignore the others who only sat at home while he was salving the ship.

But it was not many days before he had to make a little more

of it; he remarked to Jörgen Fisherman: "You know, I was after driftwood. And then it was just as if somebody said to me that I ought to row farther and farther out. It was exactly as if I had an inspiration!"

Ay, Jörgen nodded thoughtfully at this, for Nature had many hidden secrets.

"I'm not making too much of it; I'd never dreamt of a whole big derelict from the open sea. But as I sat there rowing it came over me—farther out, farther out! And now, as you know, I'm a man who's seen a good deal of the world and been to sea since I was fourteen. I've seen what the other side of the globe's like, so now it's almost as if I didn't belong to this little town any more, I might say. But I'll have to live and die here, God help me, there's no getting over that!"

It was extraordinary how Oliver's heart was lightened. This stroke of luck with the disabled vessel altered his way of looking at things, his bitterness left him, he grew more gentle, more patient. Not that he pulled himself together and turned industrious, but he took to strolling about in his new clothes, and the trouser might flap emptily about his wooden leg, but he no longer cursed his misfortune. "You can buy as much as you like as far as I'm concerned," he would say to his mother, as obliging as could be. One day he came upon an old woman who had a table cloth to raffle. "Let me see it, that's a fine table cloth!" said Oliver and took some tickets out of charity. It was almost as if a kind of godliness had come upon him.

That lasted a week or so, then there was no more of it. Consul Johnsen of the Wharfside had given him an advance on the salvage money, but the Consul could not calmly proceed to sell ship and cargo and pay out the whole sum. Had Oliver imagined he could go on drawing advances? In any case he must have expected it to last a while longer; everything was going so well, it was a glorious time, Oliver could stalk down to the vessel and pump her out every day, almost as if he owned her.

But then the crew turned up. Oh, the crew turned up from somewhere a long way to the south, skipper and three men, the lords of the ship. No, there could be no question of condemning the vessel, they started repairing her at once. And as they were now in Norway they wouldn't sail their bricks back either; they sold them to the Consul and took a cargo of planks on board in return. Then they settled up for everything and sailed.

The golden days were done, Oliver was once more on the rocks. How had it all come about? Well, of course there was no getting round the salvage money, but Oliver had to divide it with two others, the two fishermen, so it didn't amount to a fortune for each. "Don't I even get the lion's share?" asked Oliver. He got the lion's share and extra payment for pumping. But he had received it all in advance, and what had become of it?

He had done uncommonly well out of this little piece of luck, but now it was a thing of the past. He was an injured man. What did Jörgen think and what did Martin of the Heath think? He slouched over to Mattis to hear what he would say about it.

Mattis was in a queer frame of mind to-day, he was a riddle. He made no reply to Oliver's greeting and did not offer the cripple a seat. He looked as if he might be angry; well, when a man grinds his teeth and jumps about there's very little question of his state of mind.

Oliver was full of his own troubles: he had been fooled, properly done in the eye! "What do you think of it now, I was the one who found the ship and brought her in, and what do I get for it? I'm sorry I took a penny of it and so help me God I'll chuck it back in their faces!"

"Shut up with your cackle!" the carpenter suddenly screamed.

Oliver looked at him: he was working like a maniac and his hands shook with excitement. Was he drunk? If he wanted a row he could have it; Oliver straightened his bulky shoulders.

"I want those doors of mine back," said Mattis.

"Oh," said Oliver. "What was it you said? Doors?"

"I want them back!" fumed the carpenter. "I've paid you for them, they were mine. Don't you get me?—the doors!"

Oliver was struck rather dumb at such an unreasonable demand, and all he answered was: "You gave me the doors. And you had a good right to after all there has been between us."

Mattis flung down his tools and stood right up: "Between us? I won't have a single blessed thing between us. No. Not so much as a speck. What have I got by it? No, it's what I said: when they're that kind, with their nostrils going in and out—thanks, not for me. But let that be; I haven't any use for you hanging around here again and I'm going to get my doors back!"

Was ever a man so unreasonable! Oliver had called in a friendly way to get a little pity, and instead of that he was thrown out. It must be something to do with Petra, thought Oliver. He said: "If you've come in for any sort of scandalous tricks on the part of womenfolk, it's because I was to have had her. I can't help that."

The carpenter set to work again with a scornful toss of the head and let it all go hang. "Well, now you can take her yourself," he said. "In the state you've got her in," he added.

Oliver didn't understand a word of it, but as he had been practically ordered out of the workshop he got up and stumped across to the door.

"It beats all!" said the carpenter, laughing furiously to himself; "they thought they'd catch me with it!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Oliver.

"Oh, it was a sly and foxy trap you'd all laid!" the carpenter went on, still laughing to himself. "But Mattis had his eyes about him! He spotted it. Not for Mattis, he said!"

Oliver waited a moment with his hand on the door-handle to hear if there was more coming; to his surprise he saw that the carpenter was crying, his whole body shook. As he opened the door he heard an unrecognizable voice behind him: "You can take her now! And I'll come and take the doors!"

But for all these months Oliver had been accustomed to the indulgence shown to a cripple, and now he was spoken to as if he hadn't a wooden leg! The carpenter's behaviour hurt him, he showed great self-restraint, but said with a snort: "You'd better take me too if you'd like to try! Do you think I'm afraid of you?"

The carpenter was now a man again, he snatched his coat from the peg and said: "I'll come along now and take them!"

Seeing him in earnest Oliver relaxed again; he opened the door wide and got outside quickly: "I haven't even got the doors," he admitted; "I sold them up at the Heath."

After that there was a silence behind him, the carpenter was probably left speechless. Let him stay there, let him stand in his doorway and not find a word to say!

But perhaps Oliver didn't feel quite safe, he strolled about the streets a good while before he thought of going home; the carpenter might take it into his head to visit him after all; what a way to treat a cripple!

There was Petra crossing the street; she looked at him and nodded. So then it was something to do with Petra, whatever it might be; she must have refused the carpenter, she wouldn't have Mattis with his nose. And didn't he burst into tears for everybody to see, instead of being a man! It struck Oliver that he really ought to be equal to another long trip, the last was so marvellously interrupted. And of course Jörgen would again stick at lending his boat, people were so queer. What if he made a proper long trip outside the islands! It was far too late for the eggs, but he might find driftwood. There was no knowing what he might come across. Perhaps his luck was lying in wait for him.

That afternoon he saw Petra for the second time in the street and again she nodded. Oddly enough he happened to see her more and more often in the next few days, Petra who had been invisible for weeks and months. It was not that he himself took

any trouble to meet her, it was pure chance. He had become more of a man now, had salved a ship and got into the paper, he went about in new clothes and had a yellow straw hat to take off; but he never showed himself off or got in the way of the girls. On the contrary, he was full of his long trip to sea.

After a while he began to fall out with his mother again; one day matters came to a head when his mother asked: "I suppose you want me to get relief again?"

"I can't stop you!" he shouted back.

"Your father ought to be alive to hear you!" she said, on the point of tears.

"Oh."

"Yes. He wasn't a man to stick indoors all day. He worked hard early and late and kept a civil tongue into the bargain."

Oliver snorted to himself. A civil tongue—his father? Yes—now. That was the way with women: when you were dead and gone they pulled a long face over the lost one. Oliver remembered all their battles when he was a child, they were no light matter, oh no.

"And there you sit whistling," said his mother, "with your smart hat on one side," she said, "and you don't care what happens. I have a mind to know how you think this is going to end."

"I'm not worried about myself," he answered. "Not a scrap! I'm going for another trip to sea. For that matter I've been thinking of a job in the lighthouse service."

He was rather short of provisions this time, but he had the loan of Jörgen's boat, took fishing-tackle and a pot with him and rowed out to sea. He must have meant to live on the fish he caught. He was away three days and his mother too, she had left home, wherever she may have gone, and when Oliver came back he found the house empty.

He had had no great luck this trip, it seemed he hadn't even caught much fish. So he put a pot of potatoes on the fire.

Well, it hadn't been a hap-hazard trip by any means, he had a fine load of driftwood in the boat besides a good bunch of eider-down secreted under his armpit; ay, and they were lazy, care-free days he had spent outside the islands. After eating the potatoes he was fairly well pleased with himself; he went down to the boat and disposed of most of his wood to folks who were not inclined to haggle with the cripple. So now he had some coppers in his pocket again.

Day after day went by.

One evening Petra came. He thought at first he was mistaken; she had on a new grey cloak, and besides, how could Petra come and see him, her old sweetheart, after she had broken with him? "What a stranger!" he said, rather embarrassed.

"I just thought I'd look in for a minute. Where's your mother?"

"You may well ask."

"Ah. Who's doing your cooking?"

"Who should do it?" he replied evasively. What has it to do with you? he thought maybe. She might sit there in her fine cloak, oh yes, but he was not going to put himself out for her. "What's on with you and that Mattis?" he asked to put her in her place again.

"Mattis? How do you mean?"

"He was crying for you," said Oliver with a scornful laugh.

"For me? You're joking. There's nobody cries for me."

He had cornered her properly, that was clear, she showed it in her face, and he set her down with another good laugh at her and her new cloak.

"Why are you like this?" she asked gently, getting up from her seat.

"Well, well, it's no affair of mine," he said to show how far she and her concerns were from him.

"I read about you in the paper," she began again.

Now he might have been grateful to her for having read about him in the paper, but no. What had come over Oliver? So

changed, so transformed, almost like another person. She was at her wit's end and tried him in all sorts of ways; at last she asked him to lend her the paper. She wanted to read it again.

It appeared that he carried it on him; he took it out of his pocket, carefully wrapped in a paper bag, and said: "You can take it with you, I don't want it back."

A couple of nights later she came again to Oliver's house and it was a Sunday evening, so she was even smarter than before. Perhaps he had expected her, he had made some artless preparations; first he had swept the floor and polished the stove, and then he had stowed all the unwashed cups and dishes in the new room. And chance came to his help: he had actually found some small Italian coins in the pocket of his old waistcoat and now he spread them over the table to make a show. After that he seated himself and took a snooze. When Petra came in he stretched himself unconcernedly and yawned.

"I've brought back the paper," she said. She knew the paragraph by heart and she read it out; there, he could hear what the paper said, fine words, he could go far in the world on the strength of that.

"I've been far enough in the world," he answered with pride.

"Yes, to be sure you have. Who's washed your floor?"

What business was it of hers! Had she come to crow over him? He answered cunningly: "The girls."

"What girls?"

"Who told you to ask?" he replied, putting her in her place.

"I might have done it," said Petra.—She was not looking at all spry, by the way, rather ailing in fact; oh dear no, she wasn't at her best.—"I might have made coffee for you if you'd like it," she said humbly. "I brought some coffee on the chance."

This was by no means a displeasing idea, but— "No, don't trouble yourself," he replied.

"Goodness me, can't I do as much as that!" she said, and set about it at once.

He noticed that she supported herself on a chair and turned away once or twice to spit. "Why do you keep your cloak on, can't you take off your cloak?" he said.

"It's only a light spring cloak. What queer money you have there, what sort of money is it?"

"It's from foreign parts."

"What a lot of places you've been to!" she said.

"It's from Italy. That's the kind of money they have there; soldi. Would you like to have it?"

"No, you mustn't rob yourself."

He gathered up the coppers and threw them into the pocket of her cloak.

Then they talked about his mother, she must be coming home again soon, and about his last trip outside the islands, it was a risky thing to row so far in an open boat. He fetched in cups from the new room and she washed them and poured out his coffee; she had just had some, she pretended, and couldn't manage any more just now. Then she sat down and the perspiration broke out on her face.

Oliver on the other hand was beginning to feel good, he even chaffed her a little about the carpenter, without malice, he had nothing against either of them: "Well, so there *was* something between you and that Mattis?"

"You're talking stuff and nonsense! That Mattis?"

"Well, weren't you going to take him?"

"That *Mattis!*" Petra clapped her hands together. She would have none of Mattis, made a clean sweep of Mattis, she even went so far as to make fun of his big nose.

"That's strange!" said Oliver, and her assurance did not displease him. "I understood it was so," he said.

Petra looked down at her feet and murmured: "There's only one I would have taken in all my life."

Oliver turned this over in his mind and suddenly asked: "Are you still in service at Johnsen's? What sort is that Scheldrup?"

"That Scheldrup? How do you mean?"

"I only asked. He carried on like a kid that time I came in with the derelict and wanted to report about it all."

"Oh."—Petra poured him out another cup of coffee and sat down again. Then she began: "Well now, Oliver, what would you say if—?"

"If what?"

Silence.

"Well, I don't know," she said, shaking her head and fingering the Italian pennies. "But don't you think it might be as it was before between us?"

The question made no particular impression on Oliver, perhaps he had expected it, he must have thought a thing or two. "What put that into your head?" he asked.

"I've been thinking of it the whole time."

"I'm not fit for anybody now," he said.

"Don't say that. I'm sure you could get something to do at the Consul's."

"The Consul's!" he snorted. "No, but I've had some idea of a job in the lighthouse service."

"Yes, that too. You'll find something, I'm sure."

Silence.

"It's not to be thought of," he said. "Broken man and empty house. Well, I dare say I could get a couple of doors to put in, but—."

She saw it was not impossible and did not press it, but she gently hinted that she herself had enough for a couple of doors. And she showed him that she still wore his ring, everything was as before. It can't be denied that Oliver gave her rather a stare when she began to speak of the ring, perhaps he even felt a little foolish; if he was to say anything he must carry it off with a touch of flippancy:

"Ha-ha, and now you've got somebody else's name in it?"

"No, I've had it scratched out. Would you like to see?"

That Petra, a deuce of a girl she was in many ways, so smart and equal to the occasion! But this was almost too much. "Aren't you going to give him back the ring?" he asked.

"The ring? I'd like to see myself!"

Then Oliver gave a real good laugh to save both their faces.

"Give him back the ring?" she said. "Feel how heavy it is! It's pure gold, isn't it?"

Oliver was hurt: "How you do talk! Do you think I bought you a brass ring in foreign parts? There's genuine carat gold in the ring."

"That's what I thought. It shall never leave my hand."

But it couldn't be allowed to pass off so easily as all that. Her idea evidently was that she was now engaged to him again, but oughtn't they to think about it, to think it over a bit? It was not going to be the death of the carpenter, he himself had been the one to back out; besides, it was a proper trick to play on Mattis for behaving so badly to a cripple. But all the same, there was a lot to be considered.

"What am I thinking of!" she exclaimed, jumping up and seizing the coffee-pot again. "I didn't see you'd drunk up."

And Oliver let her fill his cup, it was good, strong coffee; altogether Petra brought a blessed comfort with her, just by her little way of leaning on his shoulder while she was pouring out. "There's more coffee where this comes from!" she said, and sat on his knee. "Can you still bear me?"

"As if I couldn't bear you!" he said like a man. "I can bear just as much as before."

"There, you see! So why shouldn't it be all right?"—She nestled up to him, cloak and all, and kissed him with an ardent whimpering: "Well, what do you say, Oliver, will you have me?"

Now this was going a little too far, but never mind, all things well considered perhaps he might do worse. How she wanted it, how she wanted it!

"Hm!" he said. "Sitting here and thinking it over I believe"—

here he pulled up and made a dead silence for a moment—"that perhaps it can be managed."

"Yes," she panted.

"Since you want it."

"Yes," she panted.

V

AND NOW again the days went by, by no means worse than before, but better; Petra brought one thing and another for the house when she moved in, and Oliver fished more regularly than before. A certain love of adventure still clung to him; one fine day he might row far out to sea in his own frail boat and stay away till next morning. He was a queer fellow in this way.

No, things were by no means worse than before, and Oliver was content so long as he was not faced with actual want. Nor did his mother return home empty-handed from her rambles, but brought a sack on her back with food and clothes. A short time before a sack like these would have been the occasion of a fine squabble, but now they were three and they shared alike for decency's sake if for nothing else. Oliver was unexceptionable as an engaged man.

One day an old woman came to the house; Oliver recognized her and was quite ready to take some more tickets for her raffle, but it turned out that he had won, the woman brought him the table-cloth. "Just look here," said Oliver with a laugh; "the Lord has not forgotten me!" Now they had a table-cloth, and Petra was as good as her word and provided doors for the new parlour and bedroom; they had a thing or two. In days gone by when Oliver came home from a voyage he had given his girl a good many presents; now these ornaments came in well, they were all set up on her chest of drawers, from the china dog and the mirror to the white angel and the tray of fancy woods.

After the wedding he allowed himself a couple of lazy days and lived well on the fragments of the feast; then from old habit his mother took to reminding him to row out again. Well, he rowed.

And he would have done that without a reminder, he said, for he knew his duty! To be sure, life was better than people said, Oliver didn't complain, he was a married man and all, the whole business was settled, there was no more doubt or shilly-shallying. It was a piece of luck he didn't let out the new rooms that time, as now he wanted them himself.

The only thing was that one day Mattis came and sent in a small boy with a message that he wanted to speak to Oliver. But Oliver had nothing to say to that man, not a word: "What does he want with me? Tell him he's not to trouble himself to come to my house, that man!"

They could see the carpenter stalking to and fro past the window and throwing out his chest, ho! it looked as if it wasn't the first encounter he had had with Napoleon. "He's mad enough to go for a cripple," said Oliver at sight of him. "You two can talk to him if you have any accounts to settle!" he said to the others. Petra gave her hair a pat and made herself a little tidy and irresistible and went out into the street.

They could see from the window that the carpenter gave a start. Where was all his valour now! Question and answer followed outside, nothing happened; if they were *talking about the* doors, let them talk; but they were much more *likely* to be talking about the *ring. Oliver sat far back* in the room, with nothing but his nose showing, and followed the interview. Now the carpenter wakes up, he is himself again and looks Petra in the face, he begins to wriggle about as he talks, he dances round her in a ring. And Petra—though she happens to have pimples on her face and is not at her most attractive, she calms the man's excitement with subdued and mournful words. Ah, and now if you please she's smiling sweetly and seductively. The end of Mattis is that he drops his eyes to the pavement, and when Petra gives him her hand he takes it without looking up, and when he has stood like that for a while he goes off. Mattis goes off. And Oliver sits in his room and almost feels sorry for him.

And after that no more unpleasant things turned up.

No more?

Oh, but then time went on and many things happened; autumn storms put a stop to all fishing, Petra's time was taken up with the child, the boy she had got, the old mother had let all household cares slip from her hands, she no longer went out into the wide world and came home with a sack.

Not that Oliver wanted anything, he and the cat were doing well. Oh, the old tom-cat, he was no good, all he did was to lie indoors and eat and stuff himself out with fish; at last the womenfolk began to think he must be a she-cat. And Oliver, didn't he sit there too and take his ease, rocking the child's cradle and keeping an eye on the street? His hands had grown smaller and whiter, and his face was better-looking than it had been. It annoyed him that he did not see his way to a fur cap for the winter; how could he row out on a winter's day in his straw hat? "Can't you get a sou'wester?" said his mother. "You can get yourself a sou'wester," he replied, "and I'll have an otter-skin cap!" A vain man he was. The blue necktie, once so smart, had lost its lustre, it was a sad affair, but there must be a way of getting over it; if it couldn't be dyed perhaps Petra could turn it? But the wrong side turned out just as faded. Then Oliver seemed to get a little peevish and said: "I thought you said once that I could get a job with Johnsen of the Wharfside; what happened about it?"

Poor Petra! oh yes, she'd speak to the Consul.

"Why do you always call him the Consul?" he asked with irritation.

"We used to call him the Consul when I was in the house."

"But plenty more have been made consuls," said Oliver; "Heiberg's a consul, Chandler Olsen's a consul. No, you needn't be so particular!"

It was true, there were now so many of these consuls, oh, so many of these vice-consuls and consular agents, so many fight-

ing over the bones, the coast town was thick with them. They did not always get it without strife and envy, there was a good deal of covert opposition, one business man would not allow another to flourish behind his back. Johnsen of the Wharfside had to put up with many equals, and what had not Fru Johnsen to put up with, God was her witness!

Perhaps it was at a particularly unfortunate moment that Petra called on C. A. Johnsen; he had no work for her husband. Or would it have helped her if there had been a trace of charm and daintiness in her looks? Poor Petra, she was gaunt and grey, and the Consul said straight out: No really, Petra, she must excuse him. She had better try some of these newfledged consuls, didn't they carry on some kind of business? Couldn't her husband get a job with Olsen, weighing groats or something? But it was quite right of her to come to him first, to C. A. Johnsen, he would try to find work for Oliver later on, but not now. No, she mustn't look so downhearted, there were others besides herself who were hard up, times were bad, even the steamer *Fia* hadn't made things much better. And why wasn't Oliver fishing?

The Consul looked upon Petra and her affairs with kindly brown eyes and did not turn her away without compassion, but she had to go away unsatisfied.

What now? What else but that Oliver pulled himself together and took to fishing like a man, every day indeed, early and late. He would show them! And he never took a fish to Johnsen of the Wharfside, but passed him by in a marked way. Later on when he caught more fish than he could carry he fixed himself up with empty cases on the quay and opened a fish-market, a prodigious idea. There he stood and bossed it. For a few days the families shied at the long walk down to the quay, but as there was always a shortage of fish they had to give in and be thankful. Oliver's eyes had grown so dull and he was a trifle fat and imbecile to look at, but not always, not when there was a trick to be played, he was sharp enough then. There he stood

with his fish, and he didn't shout his wares, no, on the contrary, he put up the price and made it enormously dear. "Will you have it? Well, then you needn't!" Oliver knew that he could sell his fish to the passenger boats; he also knew that folk could not be too close-fisted with a cripple.

Throughout that autumn Oliver and his family lived better then ever, and the womenfolk appreciated their breadwinner and let him have the best of everything; the breadwinner got syrup on his evening porridge, the breadwinner got waffles for his Sunday breakfast. It was no more than his right. He improved his position, he paid off a little of his old debts with the shopkeepers and could afford to paint the two doors to the new rooms, his professional reputation began to rise with his fellow fishermen, with Jörgen and Martin. They had gone on all these years dragging their fish round to every house in the town without a grumble, until Oliver taught them to stand still behind a counter on the quay and put up the price. They thanked him for his invention. "You see, I've been about the world a little," replied Oliver.

The growing esteem in which he was held by his own people and others reacted on him and did him good. As he passed the window coming from his day's work he could hear them already bustling indoors and Petra saying to the child: "Here comes Papa!" It was extraordinary how these well-planned words warmed him, and Oliver even insisted that the boy in the cradle understood them. This was not impossible either; the words were repeated every day at a certain time and were regularly followed by a creaking of the door, a cold draught and the entrance of a man who nodded over the cradle. When the boy was a few months older and sat playing alone there was no doubt he followed what was going on in the room quite sensibly; just look at the rogue, the prodigy—as soon as his mother unbuttoned her bodice he began to smack his lips, and when his mother said "Here comes Papa!" his brown eyes turned to the door.

There were great doings with Oliver and the boy. The fact that the child stretched out its arms and wanted to come to him was altogether too much for the cripple. This little creature—did you ever see the like?—this nothing at all, this bit of a youngster, he-he, he was a deuce of a fellow, upon my soul! The worst of all was when the child started crying when Papa went out, that was too bad, Papa couldn't stand it, he was afraid of crying himself and so he shouted to Petra: "Take him up and nurse him, I tell you!" whereupon Oliver skipped away from the house with his wooden leg.

Oh, he had many a dispute with the womenfolk about what the child understood and did not understand, he often took its part, showed it pictures and letters and gave it all kinds of things to play with. They were children both of them, droll and idiotic. "You must be mad," screamed the womenfolk, "did you give the child the coffee-pot to play with?" "Well, what's he to have to bang about?" He brought the ornaments off the chest of drawers to the boy, and when the youngster flung a little mirror against the floor Oliver took the blame and said he had dropped it himself.

They were blessed days! And Petra grew pretty again and wanted to go out a little on Sundays. Well, let her go, Oliver had nothing against it, Grandmamma could go too, he couldn't understand why sound and able-bodied people stayed indoors. He himself kept to the house, and when the child was asleep he dozed at the table. Did he have dreams? Did memories of the past sail through his sluggish brain? He had good reason to brood over his terrible fate, but perhaps that had already blunted him.

Then Petra came home at dusk, and it was high time, for by then the baby was screaming like a little pig. The fact was that Oliver tried to teach him to read, but in the middle of the lesson the boy started howling, and Papa swung him grandly up and down and talked nicely to him: "There, there, it's all right, you mustn't lose heart, you'll learn it as sure as my name's Oliver

Andersen!" But the boy was howling for milk and nothing else.

Now if only Petra had humbled herself and regretted being so late, but not a bit of it. It must have brought her up short to come in from the life outside and be met with a howling child. So young and so tied already, so kept under. "Now be quiet with you, here I am!" she said to the child. Oh, but she gave herself time to take off her Sunday finery and stood and looked at herself in the glass as she did so; altogether she was quite disgusting, and Oliver was more than patient not to give her a taste of his crutch.

When he had looked at her for a while he shouted furiously: "Why the hell don't you take the young 'un?"

"Why don't I take him? I'm going to take him."

"Yes—after he's yelled himself black in the face."

"Let him yell. It won't kill him."

Oh, there was no doubt Oliver ought to have used the crutch. Won't kill him? God, what a fool! But it was starving him. There she could see—as soon as the child got what he ought to have he quieted down at once. "You ought to use your brains," said Oliver, making every allowance.

But Petra tossed her head, Petra sulked. What had come over her? Didn't she understand where she had landed herself? She was not a girl any longer; quite the contrary, she was married and done for, all hope abandoned! Poor Petra, she had been properly caught and had had to make the best of it; oh, what a cross she had had to take up! She couldn't bear it like a decent woman; and what other girl would have borne it? Devil a one. She had been in high favour at the Consul's, twice they had put up her wages and young Scheldrup had been in love with her and no doubt was still. And then to be stuck like this!

"It's just as if you didn't remember the child sometimes," said Oliver like a just judge.

"I remember him night and day. Do you want me to take him on my back when I go out?"

Petra snorted. Oliver looked at her more closely, and on getting a whiff of her breath he understood more about her: she had been in somewhere and had drinks. He-he, splendid! that's where she got her boldness and her eloquence.

"Where have you been?" he asked.

"Oh, I've been to lots of places."

"Anyway you've been in somewhere and got a drink."

"Can you tell that? Yes, I was at the Consul's. They had a party and I lent a hand for a bit. It was the mistress who gave me a glass."

Petra was no drinker and her explanation was good enough if it was true. If it was true. She didn't shrink from a fib, a falsehood, far from it, and not being any too good at romancing she carried it off with wheedling and audacity. Oliver might believe her or not about going to the Consul's, what difference did it make? There she sat now, nursing the baby, rather thick-witted, but young and pretty, wild maybe, a trifle flighty, what of it? No, she wasn't exactly bright, she was ordinary and insignificant, a girl in a pair of shoes, oh, but she had her good points, was warm of body, deuced attractive. Now she'd come home and there she was, in the house; she belonged to Oliver, there was nourishment in her, she had milk, he could see her nipples.

But now Petra had had something to drink, and maybe she had it on an empty stomach and couldn't stand more than one glass, so it made her brave. So it made her reckless and ill-behaved. Look how she tossed little Frank up and down, the child, a thing she knew Oliver would take amiss. That led to a quarrel and Petra showed her teeth; she didn't care even when old Grandmamma came in from the street and heard her. What? thought Grandmamma, are they quarrelling in earnest? She heard the young wife say to her husband: "What have you got to boast of?"

"I?"

"Yes, you. You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

"You can see how I am," he said.

At that she laughed and answered: "A good thing if you were even that!"

Grandmamma didn't understand a word of this, but she was surprised at her son; why didn't he do something desperate? There he sat. Petra's words were so odd, what was she hinting at? Oliver held his peace.

"What's the matter?" asked Grandmamma.

Nobody answered her.

All at once Oliver asked ominously: "What made you want to take me? I don't understand it."

To this Petra answered: "You understood all right."

"What did I understand?"

Silence.

Grandmamma went about the room, taking off her Sunday finery and hanging it up, but she was all ears. What could Petra know about her husband more than anybody could see on the outside of him? What secret blemish was there? Had he been in prison or was he going there? Grandmamma remembered now that for a longish time Petra had twitted her husband, half in fun but half contemptuously; she would laugh at him and drop rude hints that he was about as much use as their tom-cat, he could eat fish.

A stillness fell upon the room. The child was asleep and the others kept quiet. "What news did you hear in town?" asked Oliver to show an accommodating spirit.

As Petra did not open her mouth his mother answered: "I didn't hear any where I went. Oh yes, there's going to be a big school started."

"Ah, is there going to be a big school here?"

"So they say. And they're going to build a huge stone house for it."

But it was his wife Oliver wanted to draw into the conversation, so he asked her direct: "Who was there at that party?"

"What party?"

Ah, she had forgotten. Then it must have been a trumped-up tale. He made up his mind to get to the bottom of it to-morrow.

"You mean at the Consul's? All the swells were there."

"Were their wives with them?"

"No. Well, I don't know."

"Ah, then you weren't waiting at the table?"

"Why do you ask questions all the time?" she burst out with a laugh. "Perhaps you don't believe me?" Oh, but she can't have felt altogether safe, her laugh was hollow. They were both balancing on the tight rope. All at once she took her line and stroked his hair, chaffing him: "No, you ought to have taken that nurse of yours down in Italy, Oliver! She'd have made a man of you!"

And Oliver chaffed back, half seriously— Yes indeed, he regretted the nurse.

VI

THE WINTER wore on, day by day.

But of course Oliver hadn't the staying power, his industry was put on, he got tired of sticking to the fishing. He put the blame on the child.

Little by little he got into the way, on coming home from his fish market, of ostentatiously examining the child in its cradle, listening to it to make sure it was breathing. And he asked insulting questions: "I suppose they haven't given you anything to eat, Frank, they've forgotten it, haven't they?" At first the womenfolk laughed and took it as a joke, but Oliver seriously declared that he was anxious. Afterwards he openly used the child as a pretext when he wanted to stay ashore: its cries were too heartrending when he left it.

He gave up his place on the quay to Jörgen Fisherman, offered it himself to Jörgen: "It's the best place and you shall have it. You and I, you know, Jörgen!"

Wasn't he going to fish any more?

Not for sale, he was going to fish for himself. Jörgen was to have the pitch for the whole winter at any rate; perhaps Oliver might want it again in the spring. He explained it more fully to Jörgen: he hadn't the heart to stay away from little Frank; come what might, the child wanted him and nobody else. It was amazing in a little chap like that, and could Jörgen tell him the reason why Papa was preferred to Mamma and all the rest?

It must be inborn in the child?

Just what he'd been thinking himself: the father was the real source of its life and the child clung to that; the mother was only the soil it was planted in. Wasn't that perfectly clear? The

grass it grows and the ship she floats on the water and the sky has its stars, that was all easy enough to understand. But now there was another thing, and of course nobody on the face of the earth could explain to him how Frank—how a child—he wasn't more than that high, and he had so much sense already!

Empty talk, fo'c'stle cogitations; it was just like women's chatter over their knitting-needles. But Jörgen who was more taciturn had to fall back on his usual comment that Nature had many hidden secrets.

The town took Oliver in another way, the town thought, as was to be expected, that he deserved to be put on bread and water for his laziness. Had anybody ever heard of a man being kept ashore for a child?

But there are many secrets hidden in Nature, in Oliver's nature too. And so this time he defended his lapse from industry in a fashion of his own. Of course he was lazy, but did they think he had no reason for being so?

One morning he noticed that Petra was in a cold sweat over the coffee kettle. "Are you queer?" he asked. "Yes," she replied. He let it pass, took his food, rowed out to fish and came back in the afternoon. Petra was out of sorts, she seemed to have a pain in her mouth; Oliver noticed the careful way she chewed, and she wouldn't look at the coffee; she spat when his eyes were off her. "Are you still queer?" he asked. "Yes, I tell you!" she answered snappishly.

Then it was that he looked at her in a deliberate fashion, looked her slowly up and down, not on the sly but straight out, meaning her to notice it. When he had done that he dropped his eyes to the floor and sighed.

Oh, Petra had eyes in her head, she knew what he was up to. "Do you want some more coffee?" she asked and filled his cup.

He made no answer; no, so plunged in thought he seemed to be that he neither saw nor heard. Had he moved her with his sigh?

At any rate she kept quiet as she tidied up the room. "Drink your coffee before it gets cold," she said.

Oliver was recalled from far away, oh, from the land of oranges or perhaps from the realms below, and he got up. Now the whole scene might have passed off in tragic earnest, but an accident was to spoil it. "Well well, Frank, now I'm off," he said to the sleeping child. So far all was well. But now he began to search his hip pockets and did not find what he wanted. "And I'll come back to you this evening, Frank," he said. He rummaged on a shelf, he opened a drawer, and did not find it. Then at last he found it in the cradle—his sheath-knife, that huge weapon he cleaned fish with on the quay. He had given it to the child to play with the evening before and forgotten it. Oh, it was all up now, Petra clapped her hands and then burst out laughing. Oliver's sigh was altogether wasted, he slunk away to his work, a beaten man.

But why this scene at all? A paltry game! Couldn't a married woman be indisposed and take a dislike to coffee? Oh, how insurmountable it seemed all at once to Oliver, how gloomy and desperate; God had not blessed him with better wit. He gave it up. Not that from that day he blamed his own laziness for anything, nor did he complain of others, that he did not; but he blamed it on the child. Thus he had a reason for taking a holiday.

So the winter passed.

And so passed more winters than one—in idleness and domestic strife, in bad food, in rags, in darkness.

In the spring Oliver usually roused himself and fished away properly till autumn, and in that time the family lived better again, he paid off instalments to the shopkeepers for the winter's flour and margarine and shuffled along. It was one way of doing it. He forfeited the esteem he had once cultivated among his fellow-townsmen, they all looked down on him, which perhaps he deserved, God knows.

When Frank got a little brother, a brown-eyed squirrel in the cradle, Papa took it as he ought and did not despair; he was kind to both children, but Frank, the first-born, was still his boy, and Abel, the second, was not taken much notice of. Even the mother preferred Frank, because perhaps he was the prettier; as Frank's clothes grew too small for him his brother had to take over what was left of them, year after year Abel went about in ragged breeches. Not that it hurt Abel's feelings, far from it, he generally found something in the pockets of these cast-off clothes when they came to him, a pocket-knife, a pipe, a stump of pencil, buttons, fish-hooks, nails, and these things he instantly swapped for others, prudently letting them change ownership. This was one of Abel's methods of acquiring worldly goods. He had however other methods, he was everlastingly running about with Jörgen's son, Edevart, who was rather older than himself and could therefore teach him a great deal; these two earned coppers by running errands, by doing odd jobs and by an occasional lucky "find." One day they went so far as to find coffee in Chandler Olsen's warehouse, and how could they avoid it? There it lay staring them in the face, somebody must have forgotten it, a whole bag, just opened; the boys thought it would be worth something. Pockets were hardly enough here, but pockets had never come in so handy. On the way home Edevart had some doubts about taking his share of the goods home, but anyhow Abel walked straight into the house with his. His mother took the coffee and even promised him something in return; however, she forbade him to find any more coffee. Next day when Abel arrived at the warehouse again with something to carry it in, his partner had a shameful story to tell him: Edevart had first been forced to sneak back to the bag with his coffee, and when he came home again he had had a thrashing. Edevart was now in doubt whether he would own his parents any longer.

This coffee, instead of being a source of lasting prosperity, also brought annoyance to Abel; for his mother did not keep her

promise of giving him something for it. He tried both fair means and foul, but no. So he went to Oliver, to Papa, and cried.

"When a person has been promised something you ought to give it him," said Oliver the fair-minded man.

"Oh," returned Petra, "then I'm to buy from him the coffee he's stolen? You're bringing him up nicely!"

But Papa was flattered by his son's appeal, and as he had had a good day's fishing he gave Abel a whole crown. "They shan't do you out of your rights!" said Papa in the hearing of all. And thanks to this generous treatment Abel saw his way to getting a second-hand fishing-line next day. He bought it of Olaus the grazier, the same Olaus who had got a blasting charge in the face and had been blue and unbeautiful from that day. Since then he had also lost a hand. He drank like a maniac and sold all he possessed; now he sold his fishing tackle to Abel.

"Have you any money?" asked Olaus.

"Yes," said Abel; "a crown."

"One crown? I wouldn't sell it for five."

They looked at the line; Olaus smoked and spat.

"It isn't rotten, is it?" asked Abel, trying it.

"Rotten? Brand-new line. You can hang yourself in it. But anyhow—one crown, no."

"I haven't any more."

"Then you can go. What the devil are you doing here with one crown?"

Abel went.

Olaus called after him: "You—what's your name—haven't you any more?"

"No."

"Here, come and take it. But it's worth five."

Now Abel was on top. For it was really fishing that the two friends Abel and Edevart had in their heads. They had both been out with Edevart's father, they knew the fishing-grounds,

but they had no tackle, their fathers had never dared to lend them their lines and let the boys go out by themselves. Now they were all right; that evening they rowed out in Oliver's boat.

What excitement for them! Wary as little thieves they crept along the shore to get round the point and out of sight; they were not big, a couple of feet high, a mere nothing, but they were bursting with pride and full of plans. It was not sure how much they would make the first time out, but it was to go to a line for Edevart, so they would each have his own. Oh, they were quite at home in a boat, they could row and scull and backwater almost as soon as they could walk, there was no need to be anxious about the Squirrel and Edevart. As concerned Abel there couldn't have been a better day than to-day, he had just been given big boots, sea-boots; he was very proud of them, though they had originally been his father's and had since been worn out by Frank.

Then they fished.

That is to say, Abel lowered the line to the bottom and drew it up a fathom; Edevart rested on his oars. They knew what to do, ho! they were up to the whole thing. Now and then Abel let the sinker go to the bottom again and hauled it in a fathom; that was to keep the right depth. Then he let it go to the bottom again, and when he wanted to haul it in it wouldn't come; it stuck fast. What?—row north, backwater! Try rowing east, west! The line was caught in the bottom. "Here, take the oars and let me have a try!" said Edevart, the bigger boy. They rowed and they hauled, at last the line came clear. "I've got it!" cried Edevart. But when he hauled it in the line was bare, it had snapped in the middle, hook and sinker lay at the bottom of the sea.

They looked at each other, their minds were blank and they did not understand it; the line was broken. "Damn!" said Edevart, the big boy. Abel didn't exactly swear himself, but when Edevart did so it expressed what he had at heart. They could

not blame each other for the misfortune, but hadn't Olaus the grazier sold them a rotten line? There was nothing to be done but row home.

"You must get your crown back," said Edevart in consolation.

"I shan't get it back," muttered Abel gloomily.

"Won't you? I'll go with you!"

"Will you though?"—Oh, Abel put his trust in his faithful friend, his tried friend, and his spirits rose. There he sat, Edevart, pursing his lips grimly and declaring with a nod that he intended to go with him and see the thing through. To-morrow they'd look out for Olaus when he went down to the quay; he was always loafing about down there.

Well, but Olaus refused to cancel the bargain; get away, you young rats! Abel began to cry, but it was no use. "It wasn't meant for scraping the bottom, that line," said Olaus, "it was to fish with. Get out of my way, I tell you!"

But little Edevart was the bigger boy and had had some practice in monkey tricks. The friends plotted together and decided to smuggle powder into Olaus' pipe and burn him up once more. Oh, those town youngsters, they were no more than a couple of feet high before seven devils entered into them. Well, then Edevart bought the tobacco, and he wanted tobacco anyhow, so it wasn't wasted; and he found a nice lump of blasting powder where the men were working on the road. He had all he wanted; the two friends sat down on the quay and waited.

And it was a nice packet of tobacco with silver paper and smart wrapper, wickedly dear and inviting, all open and ready to use. The blasting powder was in the middle of it.

Olaus came along. "What's that muck you've got there?" he asked.

"Do you mean my tobacco?"

"Is that tobacco? Let me fill my pipe."

"No, you'll only take it away from me," replied Edevart, preparing for flight.

"Are youngsters like you allowed tobacco?"

"And besides, you can't fill your pipe with only one hand."

Olaus saw that he risked losing it and said: "Then fill it yourself, here it is. What are you playing at?"

As Edevart buried the bowl in the tobacco and stuffed it full Olaus went on with his chatter: "Youngsters like you with tobacco? Where did you get it?"

"I bought it."

"You stole it, I bet. If you'd been a brat of mine! There, fill it properly, don't be stingy!"

Edevart handed him the pipe and Olaus prepared to light it.

Now the boys retired ten paces to look at a horse that stood there tied to a post. There was something peculiar about this beast; it resembled a horse in all respects, it was brown and altogether there was no fault to find with it, but the boys questioned each other and had a lot to say about it. All of a sudden there was a fizz and a flash from Olaus the grazier and the boys saw him jump into the air. Thereupon it seemed there was some other strange thing they had to hurry off and see in another part of the town. But they heard in their rear many furious shouts as to who was to "take" them—just wait! Abel unfortunately had on sea-boots and nearly got caught at the start.

This was not the last of the two chums' pranks, nor was it the end of their fishing; it was not long before they got proper fishing-lines and used the boat with Oliver's full knowledge. Sundays were good days for the boys; as no religious disagreement existed between them they soon decided to fish on holidays when the boat was free from morning till night. And they would often come home with a little string of fish each, no less. To dispose of the fish was an easy matter; why, at the Doctor's they were ready to pay the full price and a bit more, just because the boys came to

them instead of going to the Johnsens, with whom they were undeniably at enmity. And sometimes the boys were given a thick slice of bread and butter into the bargain, the best thing they could be offered after eight hours' fasting; they were liable, however, to be questioned in the Doctor's kitchen as to whether they were allowed to fish on Sundays when people were in church, but they did not appear to be well posted in parochial matters.

Days of happiness and plenty for two reckless ragamuffins up to all sorts of games. Day or night, asleep or awake, their heads were full of adventures. Was there any dreaminess or dignity about Abel? Not a scrap. Small and sharp as a squirrel, oh, he was a madcap, his arms and legs were never at rest. He could be seen up at the church and down on the beach at the same time, he never walked if there was any chance of running, he was always in a hurry, his big boots thundered along the street. That was his style. Edevart was no weakling either, but he was older and the responsibility was on him; besides, he had always had enough food at home, so he was rounder in the body. His stoutness was by no means a hindrance to him, he could be remarkably active when the druggist came storming out into his garden and shouted: "What the devil are you doing up in that apple-tree?" When Edevart started school in earnest he lost some flesh, but not enough to matter, it was rather Abel who suffered again from this; Abel now became a pretty lean and lonely fellow. From old habit he still haunted Jörgen Fisherman's place, where a third little girl had arrived some years before, with whom he played at times; but then this little girl was not Edevart nor was she a man, no, far from it. She was called Lydia too, like her mother, Little Lydia, jolly enough for a girl, but a nuisance when she screamed for nothing at all.

Yes, Abel was lonely now; Frank, his brother, had also gone to school and besides, all his days he had been too learned and superior for Abel, there had never been much between them. Their views of life were too far apart, what fishing was to the

one, books and papers and fine things of that sort were to the other; Frank was sent to school before his time and became a shining light. He was to be a telegraphist or a bank clerk, it was his mother's ambition that Frank should one day get into the big school among the children of his betters. Everyone has an ambition; do you think Lydia, Jörgen Fisherman's wife, hadn't hers too? She had indeed, and what was worse it was a foolish one and the town smiled at it: she entered her little girls for a course of dancing lessons. Here of course Lydia was stepping far above her station.

And in fact it led to Henriksen of the Shipyard, the family of the Collector of Customs and Fru Johnsen of the Wharfside finding that they must withdraw their children from the dancing school—no, not on account of the fisherman's children, not at all; but you see, Fia Johnsen, for instance, was getting anæmic and had grown so thin and spindle-shanked that it was a pity of her. The question became one of politics. The poor dancing mistress, a stranger to the town, wrung her hands and cudgelled her brains, she had a great deal at stake; at last she found a way out: the first course was fully subscribed, of course—why hadn't she thought of it before?—but she would give another, the attendance had so far exceeded her expectations; in fact, she might perhaps have to give two more courses. Wouldn't that put it right?

And now the town witnessed a remarkable boom in dancing, none of the women laughed at Lydia any longer, the children flocked to the school. And if Lydia's children had joined, why should not the cooper's children and Barber Holte's be in it? Never had the dancing mistress clapped her hands so gaily, she was made happy for life and had learnt dancing politics. Even Edevart joined, even Frank joined, because Oliver, his father, happened to be fishing and earning money. "All right," said Oliver, "you shall learn all there is to be learnt, Frank!" But the way it went with Edevart was that he turned up on a single

occasion and then came to Abel and asked him to dance with him. Oh yes, Abel was ready enough to oblige his friend, but as he was not dressed for it and hadn't washed himself either he was promptly shown out. So they both got off.

VII

THE TOWN hummed with dancing. Had it lighted on sudden prosperity through big catches of herring along the coast or unprecedented shortage of timber and tonnage for another English war? Nothing of the kind. All was calm and peaceful outside the town.

It was this dancing mistress who had come and corrupted the whole congregation. She encountered Christian opposition, meetings were held against her at the parish room, but it was too late, the disease had spread too far. It had not only attacked the parents on their children's behalf, it threatened to attack the parents themselves. Was there ever such an epidemic? At first its chief hold was on the servant class, but the infection spread upwards, among the better sort; there was waltzing in the dining-room at Consul Olsen's and at Henriksen's of the Shipyard, the town worthies hummed tunes as they went along the street.

Outside the dancing school listeners were always to be seen who swayed their bodies in unseemly fashion in time to the music inside and dreamt they were taking part; Policeman Carlsen did nothing, arrested nobody. Petra was discovered at the top of the dark staircase, sitting in shameless melancholy and dreaming in pace with the fiddling and shuffling inside the hall. Oh, but Petra's dreams were altogether in vain, she was married and done for. And if that wasn't enough she had now grown so heavy again that she could hardly stand and had to sit all the time. For so many years she had escaped putting on weight, she had kept a pleasing and girlish figure, and now that too was past and gone. She ought to have been at home and not exposed to everybody's view, but here she was found on the staircase, and it was Scheldrup Johnsen who came and found her.

"Are you sitting here, Petra?" he said sympathetically.

"Yes," she answered. "No, go away, Scheldrup!"

But Scheldrup grew still more sympathetic, and then it was that Petra got on to her feet and gave him a sound box on the ears, Scheldrup Johnsen or no Scheldrup Johnsen. She did so. And instantly there was somebody farther down the stairs who heard the smack and came up in time to see the rest: that Scheldrup slipped into the hall and that Petra staggered down the stairs in tears and out into the street.

It was all the fault of the dancing mistress, she might have stayed in the next town. And even yet the disturbance she had raised had not subsided, far from it: more than one piece of spite was shown among the leading families on the evening of the farewell dance. The town seethed with jealousy over frocks of tulle and silk and the parents were envious of each other's children.

The Doctor and his wife accompanied the Johnsens home. Fia had now had her evening treat and was to take her tired shanks to bed, but the grown-ups might well sit up a little longer. There were others in the party, by the way, amongst them Lawyer Fredriksen, whom Fru Johnsen rather liked because he took notice of her. The Henriksens of the Shipyard were also invited though they were somewhat outside the picture: "Yes, go and fetch your wife, Henriksen, and come along. And you too, Postmaster!" But in particular the Doctor and his wife were invited with all ceremony; that was not to be omitted, they were at the top of the tree, the Johnsens were well aware of that.

Oh, the hidden enmity among these friends, these bosom friends! Rarely did it break out honestly, but it was there, latent and smouldering. They walked homeward chatting with animation, they walked four abreast, sweeping the street before them; now and again they halted and blocked the traffic, so that other people had to squeeze past. It was such a gorgeous summer night.

"I congratulate you on Fia's appearance," said the Doctor's

wife. It was easy for the Doctor's wife to be impartial and not to side with any parents in particular, as she herself had no children at the dancing school, in fact the Doctor and his wife had no family at all.—"Fia looked so nice this evening. But don't you think, Fru Johnsen, that a neat light frock would have been more suitable?"

"She would have silk," replied Fru Johnsen; "and besides, there were quite enough cheap frocks. Did you see how the Heibergs had dressed up Alice?"

Another lady said: "There was one with a big watch-chain?"

"That was one of Consul Olsen's daughters."

"Oh yes, poor thing, those Olsens don't know any better," Fru Johnsen conceded indulgently. No, she could never forgive the Chandler Olsens for having a Consulate and being rich people. Wasn't that strange? One would have thought it a great advantage for Fru Johnsen to be able to meet more and more ladies in town of her own station, but no, she couldn't put up with it. And what gave her her sallow complexion? Her face was so yellow that she must have had a tiresome digestion.

"To go from one thing to another," said Lawyer Fredriksen, the public speaker, halting the whole party. His voice was so loud in the quiet evening air, it was like a sailor in a wine-shop.—"From one thing to another—are you expecting your steamer home, Consul?"

And now Johnsen of the Wharfside was nothing loth to make answer: "Yes, the *Fia* is coming home now. It's a long while since we saw her."

"I'd like to have the money she's earned!" said Henriksen of the Shipyard. This was something he understood, not idle gossip.

And Consul Johnsen felt big, but said: "I reply to that because silence might be misunderstood. As a matter of fact the *Fia* has not earned so very much. Many a time I've been glad I had the strength to keep her going. But latterly of course—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Henriksen, wagging his head.

"I'm sure commercial morality doesn't deserve the hard things they say of it," the Doctor suddenly put in.

"How do you mean?"

The Doctor went on as though he had not heard the question: "For if it's good enough for a man like Consul Johnsen it must be workable."

"Commercial morality? How do you mean?"

A long and weighty silence, the Doctor did not care to say anything that might be pooh-poohed. Nor did the Doctor care to enter into a discussion with Henriksen of the Shipyard, therefore he addressed the whole company: "It is a calumny to say that commerce is akin to exploitation."

"Well, I never—!" exclaimed Henriksen in astonishment. And he raised his eyebrows exactly as though he had listened to a fine saying.

But Consul C. A. Johnsen was the man he was, not a model in all respects perhaps, but an enterprising, big man. The wits of the town called him the First Consul, to distinguish him from the consuls who had been appointed later and were of no great consequence.

Consul Johnsen answered: "Commerce is labour which is worthy of its hire."

"That is my opinion too. Therefore it is not right to call commerce speculation."

"Yes it is, as far as that goes. We are all speculators. Before a doctor takes up medicine he speculates that that is to be his means of livelihood and directs his efforts to that end. You shake your head?"

"Yes, every bit of it."

"Ha-ha," laughed the Doctor's wife.

"Medicine is science," explained the Doctor. "But the question whether the *Fia* earns much or little—"

"Shan't we move on?"

"Well, it stands to reason: it is things like the trading voyages of the *Fia* that people call speculation. Wrongly, in my opinion."

"Then we are all agreed," interposed the Postmaster, ever good-natured.

I'll pay him back for his spiteful jaw! the Consul restrained himself from replying. He slipped away to Fru Henriksen of the Shipyard and talked to her; she was a young and pretty woman, from the depths of the people like her husband, mother of two little girls at the dancing school but still under thirty. Consul Johnsen was quite entertaining and gallant with her, nay, he sometimes dropped his voice pretty low so that the others might not hear. You see, the Consul's daily life can't have been too flowery and delectable, he had to make the most of his opportunities. Was he not a natural force, rather grey, but still a man? It vexed him that his big son Scheldrup was within ear-shot: "Go on ahead and tell them to get ready!" he said to Scheldrup.

And what about Fru Henriksen?—so immensely honoured by his company this evening and by all the splendour she was to see on entering the First Consul's, a surpassing event in her life.

"Will you promise me something?" she asked.

The devil possessed him, he coquetted with the lady and answered: "I daren't make you any promise."

"But—why not?"

"A promise? To you? I might keep it, you know!"

At this the lady laughed and found him nothing less than charming, the First Consul was charming. And then she came out with her entreaty—that the Consul would look in on them one day, on the Henriksens of the Shipyard, he and Fru Johnsen?

"Aren't you coming?" called Fru Johnsen to them, and she stopped to wait.

There was no help for it, they had to overtake the others. But the Consul promised himself that he would have another talk with Fru Henriksen later on when her husband was seriously

engaged in mixing whiskies and sodas. He would play the good host and say: "Now, Henriksen, make yourself at home!" and then he would engage his wife in conversation.

The Postmaster was talking about offspring. He was a lean and poor man and passed as something of a failure. He also had a name for being religious and he was in the habit of saying with a thoughtful air: "Ah, what are we to believe!" As a young student his dreams had been mostly of art, of castles and cathedrals, architecture; he could never make up his mind about a calling and finished in the Post Office. Now he designed houses for God and men in his spare time; it was he who had designed the big school in town, the handsome stone building with columns which was visible far out in the fjord; he charged nothing for his work, but the Town Council complimented him. His wife was in no sense a failure, but she was no beauty, only good and a blessing to her home. She was older than her husband, but not enough to matter. She was silent in company; this evening too she had nothing to say for herself.

Offspring, said the Postmaster. His theory was that the parents, themselves, ought in general to be accorded less importance than the children. Absolutely. Everything ought to turn on the offspring: "This evening the parents have been sitting on hard benches along empty walls sharing the enjoyment of their little ones. The mothers were not dressed for the occasion, it was the children who were to be smart! Once upon a time these mothers were just as smart, I thought to myself, when they were little daughters. That was thirty years ago, when ladies wore immensely full skirts. Dear me! I thought as I remembered those times."

"An elegy!" said Lawyer Fredriksen, the bachelor.

"Exactly!" chimed in the childless Doctor. And since it was the innocuous Postmaster, who was after all a gentleman, he vouchsafed a word or two more: "Offspring," he said, "what do you want with that? Is this a world to plant offspring in? How long

have we to spend in this life and for what object, unless for ourselves? Let us make the most of our time, Postmaster, Death is after us, we shall soon be ground up. We lie between the upper and the nether millstone. Some of us are soft and amenable by nature and they are pulped without a murmur; others wriggle, like you, Postmaster, they bend their necks back and are afraid of their faces—but the next second they are ground up like the rest. It must be a queer feeling, and we shall all feel it some day; if it starts from below we shall feel our legs and abdomens disintegrating bit by bit."—As the Doctor had the audience with him he carried the joke further, the witty dog, and gave them all something to shudder at: "At last I suppose there'll be a bit of a toe left which perhaps will stir just once more in a detached sort of way. The whole thing is just glorious, it's perfect."

Silence.

"It makes one so despairing to think such things," said the Postmaster. "But even on this assumption it is good to leave behind one—"

"Offspring! To be ground up in its turn! And despairing? I don't know. For my part I keep up my spirits; I catch myself arranging my hair over the bald spots and thus repairing my decay as well as I can. And then I whistle."

"Well, well," said the Postmaster, who could find no more to say.

But Consul Johnsen caught up the ball, he was not going to give way before such a display of superiority: "If there were no offspring the human race would die out."

"Let it. It won't be my affair."

"But your business is nothing else but keeping people from dying—isn't that so?"

"Mr. Consul, Mr. First Consul Johnsen, do you come talking logic to people between the millstones?" the Doctor sniggered, a little put out. "Where is the logic of Life, the logic of the cosmic order?"

Then said the Consul: "My point is, Doctor, that personally you are for the extermination of mankind, but your trade, your calling, is to hinder this extermination."

And the Doctor didn't care to show off against a man of poor education, but the First Consul had become such a fellow, he had risen too high, the Doctor was obliged to answer him: "This is something a little above business, isn't it? It's a question of one's outlook on life. When a doctor bends over his patient I suppose he is chiefly actuated by pity for poor humanity."

"Ah yes!"

"Yes, you may sigh. At any rate he doesn't speculate."

The Consul rejoined imprudently: "He's there to earn his five crowns. The doctor is like the rest of us: he speculates in five-crown fees while I speculate in thousands, that's all the difference."—Whereupon he looked round at the others with a laugh and made it still more painful for them.

The Doctor was forced to join in the laugh: "You've set us nicely by the ears, Postmaster," he said.

"I?"

"With your offspring."

So the Postmaster had to go to it again: "Well, but, my dear Doctor, we must have offspring. You can say what you like about the millstones, they cannot be our goal."

"Our goal is in ourselves. When I die all that concerns me will be dead. Do you believe in God, Postmaster?"

"What are we to believe? Don't you?"

The Doctor shook his head: "Never met him. Do you think he belongs here?"

"Ha-ha," laughed the Doctor's wife.

The Postmaster asked: "What kind of a goal can it be that one carries within oneself?"

"One makes the most one can out of existence. Enjoyment, for instance."

"A poor goal, a short goal. In that case you are quite right,

everything ends with oneself. But one can imagine a longer goal —our eternal persistence through offspring. What do you seriously think of that? I assume you have been joking with us up to now."

"Not at all."

"Take myself for instance: I am Postmaster here. One appointment may be as good as another, as far as that goes. But what sort of hope would there be for a childless man at his death if he himself had risen no higher than this? It would be no satisfaction to me now to get something better for myself; on the contrary, I am glad I have never got any farther, since thus I have saved my powers for my children. If before I die I see signs that my children will surpass me in everything, then, as is natural, I shall feel profoundly grateful to the Almighty. Among the saddest things I know are the sons and daughters of great men, the children of famous parents. They are a sadder sight than orphans. As to myself, thank God, it may easily be imagined that even if I had achieved twice as much as I have, my children will achieve more. It is precisely this that will be my hope when I die. That I myself have advanced with the advance of my children. That my sons were not Goethe's sons."

The Postmaster's theory appealed to nobody; it was a theory and a consolation for failures who had achieved little in their lives, not for people in a fine position. "You're a devout man!" said the Doctor amicably. And Consul Johnsen, he was no end of a man himself and not merely the father of his children; ay, he might even become a bigger man than he was, he stood with head erect, his course was clear and he had something in view, something fresh in view. But Consul Johnsen also wished to be amicable to the Postmaster and not even condescending; he nodded and said: "In my poor opinion there is a good deal in what you say, Postmaster."

"Opinion!" scoffed the Doctor.

Lawyer Fredriksen, who up to now had been bored with Hen-

riksen of the Shipyard, broke in: "Why yes, opinion. But we bachelors and childless men have an opinion too."

And at that moment everyone must have feared it was all up, nobody would get a word in again. The Consul hastened his steps, threw open his door and welcomed them: "We will try to agree about a glass of wine, anyhow!" he said with a smile.

As the company entered the house young Scheldrup left it by the back door. He probably did not care for these idle discussions that were started by the Postmaster. Nobody could blame him for that, at his age life is no riddle, the summer night belongs to youth.

VIII

ELDERLY people remember bygone days and dates, they have a wonderful way of storing up in their heads all sorts of trifles as though they were valuable, as though they might turn out to their profit one day. They keep cuttings from the papers.

And now folks hear a strange steam whistle in the bay. It is none of the mail boats and it is not the little cargo boat that calls at every door once a week, so folks go up to their roofs to look out. "It's the *Fia*," they say, "see what a lot of flags she's flying!"

And instantly they recall the great crowd on the quay one Sunday long ago, they count up in their heads and know by their children's age what year it was. There was a great concourse of people, they remembered, and that was when the *Fia* was bound for the Mediterranean. Now she is coming back after long voyages, they are making a fine show on board and their hearts must be proud. Seaman Oliver Andersen was once among her crew.

Oliver limps down to the quay, throwing himself forward on his wooden leg and straddling; he is innocent enough to believe that his shipmates are looking for him on the quay, that he is the first man they expect to find. No, they are not looking for him, he is forgotten. They look down over the rail at this cripple and recognize him, but they don't seem glad, it is left to him to hail them and make the first approaches. There stands Oliver, he has turned rather grey and his hair has thinned though he is still a young man, but besides that he has grown so remarkably fat, his cheeks hang down. Has he lived so prosperously on God's earth? Was his misfortune a blessing in disguise?

A few words of sympathy with his crippled state came from the rail, but the boys had no time for more, their eyes were fixed

on the street above—at any moment their girl might come, their mother, or their wife and children, they only wanted a minute to smarten themselves up.

Of course Olaus the grazier was there with his pipe in his mouth, and he was just as usual, drunk and talking big. If the *Fia's* crew had thought of making something of a dash with their return from incredibly distant lands, Olaus spoilt it all for them, he showed not a scrap of respect.

"Where have you come from?" he asked.

"From a country they call China."

This was nothing to Olaus: "Oh, from China. Well, it's a small world nowadays," he said. "There was a time when a sailor could say he came from far away. Last week there were two fellows going round here begging food and money. I asked them where they came from. 'From Persia,' they said. Persia, that we read about in the Bible and nobody knows where it is! Have you got a fill of tobacco?"

He was given a fill, and he didn't say thank you, but he approved of the tobacco with "I've known worse," and as he hoisted up the gangway with his arm and a half he gave a word of command: "There, make her fast!"

That was Olaus. Fate had been after him too, the one-handed man with the eternally blue face; but be hanged if it had made him fat and easy. He was not swollen like a dead beast, nor was he fine and shrivelled in the face like a nobleman, but he was full of drink and glory. Was he living on his reserve? Well, what is a reserve for but to live on?

Oliver climbed on board. He shouldn't have done it, no, they were not making a fuss over him, they barely took his hand and said what couldn't be helped. They were full of their own affairs. Was Oliver to be amazed at people who were capable of coming back from China? That experienced seaman had been there himself, nothing was new to him. No, he shouldn't have gone

aboard; now he had even forgotten his English and couldn't join in their talk properly. The forecastle was the same as before, a well of darkness and stench although it had been swabbed out for the occasion. He sat down at the familiar table and babbled on about himself, they listened to him to begin with, but they wanted to hear about their own people and the town worthies; they went back on deck one after another to watch for their folks.

Oliver said: "Now take my case—I'm a broken man."

"Yes, you got all smashed up in the fork, didn't you?"

"I got smashed up in the fork! I'm a married man with several children. An oil barrel can't smash any man in the fork."

"What do you mean—an oil barrel?"

Oliver recollected himself and was confused.

"Didn't you fall from aloft and get the derrick bang between your legs?"

"No."

For so long had Oliver been talking about this oil barrel that perhaps he believed in it himself, but it appeared there was no oil barrel. What had he tried to gain by this lie, did he want to conceal something? Oliver collected himself and went on with his talk; he saw not a sign of the Captain and the boys were stand-offish; oh, they must have heard about him and his doings in letters from home, he had behaved badly, there was too much gossip about him and his household. Poor Oliver, not even when he fished out the paper and showed them the account of his great piece of seamanship did it make any particular impression. No, for now the friends and relations were beginning to arrive.

A fire was smouldering in Oliver's eyes. Maybe he was fat and a trifle imbecile, but a queer cunning flashed through him on occasion. He approached Kasper, his old chum and contemporary, and said: "Isn't your wife coming, Kasper?"

"She'll come all right," said Kasper.

"Yes, I suppose she's home again by now."

"Where has she been?"

"I don't know. It was a year or more ago she went away. They said she was abroad."

"What are you saying?" asked Kasper, feeling uncomfortable.

"I? You mustn't listen to what a poor chap like me says. But it needn't make any difference to you and the rest whether it was an oil barrel or a derrick that smashed me up."

"Yes, that's all the same," Kasper then agreed. "What was she doing abroad?"

"They said she was stewardess on board a boat."

"No! Why, I've had letters from her all the time from here."

"Ay ay," said Oliver.

On his way home he met Kasper's wife; she was dressed in her best, all innocent, going down to welcome her husband. Oliver told her in passing that Kasper was waiting for her; but whether she was too well dressed or too innocent to answer Oliver, the woman simply hurried past.

Oliver went home to his own house and his own family. His visit on board the *Fia* was decidedly a mistake. All right, he wouldn't go there any more! And as for Kasper and his wife he expected to hear no more from that quarter: the whole town was in the secret. Besides which, a cripple was protected by his own pitiful state, even if he made trouble between a married couple.

He sat down at the end of the table and began to abuse the crew of the *Fia,* they were a low crowd, he'd have given every one of them a taste of the rope if he'd had the use of his limbs.

Petra didn't answer him, didn't look at him, so tired was she of his chatter and of his person. Oh, that lump of fat in the chair there, it breathed, it wore a suit of clothes, it had buttons on its clothes; at the top end of it there was a hat tilted on one side. She knew it all by heart, a sprawling wooden leg that stuck out and barred the way, his talk, all his lies and bravado, the voice which was getting more and more like a woman's, the dull, watery blue eyes, the ever-dribbling mouth. He seemed to be deteriorat-

ing year by year, his appetite was the only thing that kept up. And there wasn't always food enough.

Strange! the life of the town went on its course and went even faster than before. When the dancing mistress had done her work and gone her way a regular dance was established every Saturday night in the court-room, and at the same time there was a visible improvement in people's clothes and way of living. But with Oliver and Petra nothing improved, everything went down, down to the bottom. Hadn't the lunatic proposed to sell the ornaments off the chest of drawers, the white angel and the money pig from foreign parts? And then one day that winter Oliver went out into the town and sold the house he lived in. It was a desperate thing to do.

More than once he had wanted to sell the house; Lawyer Fredriksen who owned it must surely be humane to a cripple. But Lawyer Fredriksen seemed to think he had helped him sufficiently when he made him famous with his report of his great exploit; why didn't he go and perform some more deeds of heroism? Sell the house, another man's house—

He simply informed the police.

You see, these Oliver Andersens ought to have been thrown out long ago, but the town protected the cripple. Now at last he had put himself outside the pale by a crime.

Oliver stumped off to the Lawyer and pleaded with him, he would cry off the bargain, the whole thing was practically undone. It was no use, the Lawyer meant to seize the chance of getting possession. No, it was no use, until Petra had to go to the Lawyer and ask him nicely, and Petra didn't manage it the first time either.

This was a pretty state of things, the home was on the brink of the abyss. What then if Petra sneaked off and sat on the stairs of the dancing hall to dream away a blissful hour? Oliver, her husband, he wasn't dying of shame and distress; on the contrary, he asserted himself and said hard things of the Lawyer, the blood-

sucker, who would not be humane to a cripple. Not that Oliver was any more ruined than before if he *was* done out of the money for the house, he was by no means at a loss for a shift when he sat at home talking in the bosom of his family. The lighthouse service—no, he had given that up; but what was to stop him getting a cart and going round among the chapel folks? What if he went to a big town and took to organ-grinding?

"Oh," said Petra to this, "just you go and do it!"

"Ah. And what will you and the family live on then?"

Well, what should they live on then? Minders, he earned enough to send money home. But here Petra had her doubts. Grandmamma had her doubts too; ay, she said straight out that Oliver would be sure to eat up all his earnings in food.

So the breadwinner's travels came to nothing and the family's circumstances remained as before. But they lived from day to day, they got along, they survived it.

Why should they be so badly off? The breadwinner had a bodily defect, what then? Hannibal was a one-eyed man, Alexander was lame. Oliver was not altogether devoid of good qualities, what were they talking about! He was actually a peaceful sort of person, he didn't go about with bloodshot eyes and greedy jaws waiting for babies to get good and fat and ready for the slaughter; no, he was kind with children. Disabled, oh yes, there was that empty trouser-leg that flapped so mournfully as he walked. But he wasn't like the hunchbacks, for instance, who look as if they were carrying themselves on their backs as they walk. Devoid of good qualities? He didn't drink, never a drop, he didn't even use tobacco any more; no, as far as that went he had grown just like a woman.

Of course it didn't make things a scrap better, but rather worse, when the third child came, a little girl who howled at night and woke the weary breadwinner. Oliver could now indulge his roving spirit again, disappear from home, row out to sea and stay away for days and nights. God knows what he was looking for

and what he found! It was especially after storms at sea that he made these expeditions, perhaps he was childish enough to hope for another derelict. Once, by the way, he found a portmanteau floating in the sea; it contained nothing but underclothes and feminine frippery, but Oliver carried it home and made a great to-do about it, and nothing would induce him to do another stroke of work that day. Another time he found an empty paraffin can with the cork in; now and again he brought home a bunch of eider-down that he had plundered from the nests in the preserves. He knew that this down was worth a lot, but he dared not try to get rid of it in town, he had to hide it.

The irritating thing was that Petra set so little store by his finds, she sniffed at them. He would steal up from the quay unobserved and walk in with a swelling chest and lay his loot on the table—there you are, something to make you open your eyes! But Petra would growl: "So that's your earnings for three days—what do we want with eider-down? And what are we to do with an empty paraffin can?"

Oliver came down to earth again and answered in an injured tone: "Now you've got one of your nice fits again!"

Petra blazed up: "Oh, I've got a fit, have I? Look at her in the cradle, do you think she's lying on eider-down?"

Oliver cast his eyes upon the child; it was lying in rags, but there was nothing wrong with it, it was only teething that made it cry. But suddenly Oliver got up and looked more closely; it was the first time he had had a proper look at the child.

"What the devil," said he, "she's got blue eyes?"

Petra gave a little start and answered: "Well, you can see that, can't you?"

"What does that come from?"

"What does it come from? How should I know! What a one you are for questions!"

Oliver stood there staring. What a muddle he was in and how stupid he was—shouldn't a child of blue-eyed parents have blue

eyes? But the others, the boys, they had brown eyes! There was some fresh mystery in this. Oh, Oliver no doubt had had his own ideas all these years and kept them to himself in torpid indifference; now he was faced with a riddle. Where had Petra been? At home. At home. A woman who gave Scheldrup Johnsen a box on the ears didn't go out.

She hadn't been out—eh?

An immense and unnatural jealousy blazed up in the cripple, for the first time he was visited by this strange smarting, which was so powerful that it distorted his features and frightened Petra; she covered up the child. Oliver staggered to the window and looked out. Now if brown eyes were right and if they were the family eyes, how could it be the same with blue eyes? He knew quite well all the gossip about himself and his household, it had not been so subtle or so innocent that he couldn't guess it; the last thing he heard was that Petra had not always been in the habit of boxing Scheldrup Johnsen's ears. What then?—Scheldrup Johnsen had brown eyes, the baby in the cradle had blue.

A serpent was gnawing at Oliver's heart. He had been at ease till now, no longer was it vouchsafed him to banish misgiving from his mind. Misgiving? It was dismay, it was anguish that worked upon him. He began to lie in wait at street corners, he would dart out and seize Petra by the bosom and ask where she was going. Day and night he was on the watch and he had no more rest, his hair was coming out. The only place where Petra was allowed to go in peace, now as before, was Johnsen's of the Wharfside, his house and shop, she might go there any time without objection. But he followed her to see she kept her word.

His madness lasted on and on, he neglected the sea in order to lurk in hiding, he begged fish from the other fishermen so as to have some to take home. And Petra, foolish woman, did not see how to relieve his malady, she rather added to it. When it had gone on for a while and she guessed it to be innocuous to life

and limb she worked him up to distraction and white heat. The blue eyes might spring from Mattis the carpenter, he thought, and he couldn't find words to express his scorn of this man, this rhinoceros, this softy. Petra stood up for him.

"Well, hasn't he got an awful nose?"

"No, it suits him to have that nose."

"Be quiet! He ought to build a stable for his nose, as he's a carpenter."

Curiously enough there seemed to be others who were made jealous, so to speak, by the blue eyes; but Consul Johnsen can only have been joking and pretending when he spoke to Petra about it:

"I hear you've got a little girl, Petra?"

"Yes."

"With sky-blue eyes this time."

Petra looked down and was silent.

"It isn't everybody that can have sky-blue eyes," said the facetious man. "No!" he announced all at once; "I haven't a place for your husband, do you hear! Try Chandler Olsen."

Once more Petra had to go home with her errand unaccomplished, home to her family and her troubles. It was a sad state of things, nobody was so hardly tried. Now and then she wept and was honestly sorry for herself, but she was too healthy and young to lose heart altogether; it was no rare thing for her to stand in her doorway, laughing and chattering with folks that passed in the street, it didn't hit her harder than that.

The seasons succeeded one another and time went by; both the boys were at school and Frank showed great ability, took a scholarship and distinguished himself, but the squirrel Abel was not stupid either, only an unspeakable rascal with other interests. Things went on, habit assisted them and God strengthened the family with a certain stubborn refusal to perish. Take little Abel; he mostly fed and clothed himself round about the town. Though he might sometimes be ashamed of being a little squirrel:

one day when he had gone out into the country he was badly in need of a little food, and as he didn't get it and couldn't get them to present him with a jacket he had found hanging on a clothes-line, he asked right out if he could buy a cup of coffee. But then the people of the farm behaved disgracefully to the squirrel and asked him if he was allowed to drink coffee. He-he, allowed! He would never go back to that farm till he was big.

His brother Frank did not go in search of adventures, he was too clever for that. He too was given many a meal and many an article of clothing in the town; nay, once a year he was given a complete suit in Consul Johnsen's shop and came home newly turned out from top to toe. That was the kind of man Johnsen of the Wharfside was, grand in himself and in his dealings with others.

So things went on. Sometimes Grandmamma too would go out again on a little trip and come back with good things, with potatoes, pork, a bag of meal, a cheese. Oh, Grandmamma was not to be scoffed at, if she only kept off the poor-rates and was not disgraced in the eyes of the other women at the pump she could roam through several parishes and the food she brought in from the country was a great help. Indeed, many a time the family owed it to her that they had a bite and sticks to burn, so industrious had she become.

Oliver himself was worst off. His malady would not leave him alone. Now he had taken a short spell of fishing again, and this was because he had got a new boat. You see, he had been on a trip to sea and found this boat adrift; it was extraordinary, it must have been moored somewhere and had come adrift, it might have come from a long way off, perhaps from foreign parts. Now of course he ought to have reported the boat, no doubt of that; but however it was, he kept it and had no worry over it either. Nobody took him to task, the cripple needed the boat, he might go to the bottom any day in his own wretched craft. At first he had had thoughts of selling the boat and getting money for it, but the

town wouldn't have that, it was going too far: "No," folks said, "if you found her you must keep her!" So Oliver spent all his spare time in fishing and used his new boat.

All his spare time.

He was not often free by any means, his malady tied him ashore, tied him to the house. Now Petra was showing signs of a loathing for coffee again, and he was almost destroyed with watching her. Hadn't he stood in corners and alleys and passages for months, spying and listening? He was miserably clad and badly fed; but jealousy kept him at his post by the hour, he stood with his heart in his throat, devoured by his suffering, the wind flapped at his trouser-leg as at a flag that was wound round the mast. As a matter of fact he was never free, he felt no safer by night than by day, he worked overtime, he was a slave. If it would even cast him on a bed of sickness and kill him, but no. What a thing it was to herd a female! Why not let her run and bar her out? What was to be done with such brazen-faced audacity that had perfectly innocent eyes and was never tired of lying? He might expect her from one direction and she might come from another; where could she have been? She might come along humming a tune, as likely as not; what had she in her thoughts, what memories was she licking her lips over?

"What are you lurking about here for?" was all Petra said, instead of sinking into the ground.

"Where have you come from at this time of night?"

"Didn't I tell you I was at the Consul's? What have you got in your hand, a knife?"

"You can see that, can't you?"

"Your fish knife. What are you doing with that?"

"I was using it on the quay."

"No; you think you can scare me."

"Be quiet!"

"But you needn't trouble yourself!"

No, Petra felt safe, he was a coward and a loathsome one, he

was nothing, she let him go hang. Then she simply walked past him into the house, the man followed her. She stopped for a moment in the passage to shame him; yes, she would show him that she, the night-bird, was the careful and orderly one: look here now, wasn't it she who bolted the street-door after them both?

"What, are you going to bolt it?" said Oliver. "I'm sure Abel's still out."

"Then let him sleep out!"

"He shan't sleep out!" shouted Oliver excitedly, and he swept her aside with his heavy body.

She gave a gurgle and said: "Why don't you kill me while you're about it?"

There was another good row, they went in and raised a racket. Grandmamma slept in the old room with the baby and Frank, she put up her head and listened, then lay down again; it was the old story, she knew it. Oliver's jealousy was over for the moment, besides which he felt good and content with the way he had behaved: she shot up against the wall, light as a child, he was the man, ho-ho, and he puffed out his chest.

The nightly tussle between his parents stood Abel in good stead: he clattered in as quietly as possible from the street and didn't hear an angry word anywhere as he went to bed.

IX

THERE CAN'T have been anything so maddening and painful as this suspense; Oliver had shirked fishing for days, he loafed about the streets and there was no trace of blessed calm about him. Now they had hung petticoats and aprons over his windows and he couldn't get a glimpse of what was going on, so he strolled to and fro in front of the house, looking like an idiot.

At last he got hold of Grandmamma and she told him: "It's another girl."

It didn't interest him; oh, what a fuss about nothing; but he chatted on to hear more: "Oh, another girl. Is she properly shaped, with all her limbs?"

"Yes, as far as I could see."

"She hasn't only one leg?"

"No."

"Ah, then we can be glad of that. It's not a good thing to have a wooden leg. What was I going to say?—has she looked up? With her eyes?"

"How do you mean?"

"I only ask. Why doesn't she howl? She isn't still-born, is she? Let me see her."

"She's gone to sleep."

Again Oliver had to wait, shirk his fishing, loaf about the street and wait. In the course of the afternoon he was able to see her awake; he took her away to the window and satisfied himself as to the kind of eyes she had. Petra lay watching him and felt safe; there was nothing the matter—the child had brown eyes.

It was extraordinary how this trifling circumstance calmed the tormented father, he bragged about the child and even joked with

Petra in a friendly way: "You're the one to do it when you choose!" Although it was near evening he rowed out to fish. For all these months he had been raging at Petra in his heart, perhaps she had again acted badly and like a depraved woman; now he thought otherwise, she hadn't been so foolish after all, she'd done splendidly, bless my soul! And now she should have fish if there was fish in the sea! The brown eyes had come back, the real family eyes, Nature had triumphed, all had come right again.

Oh, the imbecile, God knows what arguments he used!

One day he met Scheldrup Johnsen and said to him: "Now the winter's coming on and you must be kind enough to think of me."

"Have I got to think of you?" asked Scheldrup.

"Yes. Think that I'm a cripple."

"How can I help that?"

"And that I have many children."

"How foolishly people talk!" exclaimed Scheldrup, at a loss.

Oliver smiled respectfully and looked at the ground. "Well, well, there it is," said he. "But now you'll have to be kind and give me a job."

"I? What sort of job?"

"At the warehouse."

"You'll have to speak to Father about that."

Oliver slowly raised his eyes, fixed them firmly upon Scheldrup and answered: "No, you'll have to do it!"

Was Oliver threatening? Young Scheldrup drew back a trifle and returned the cripple's glance; but his eyes were blank. You see, he began with a hasty and furious look, but then it grew vacant. He must have changed his mind, remembered his conduct, remembered the box on the ears and all the gossip, he didn't want to have all this over again, so he said: "Well, I don't mind asking Father, if that's what you want."

"That's right!" was Oliver's reply.

A few days later he again met Scheldrup, who asked: "Can you take charge of the warehouse, do you think?"

Take charge of the warehouse? This could only be blowing and bravado on Scheldrup's part; there had never been any permanent man at Johnsen's warehouse, but one of the people from the shop used to run down when there was anything to do, so couldn't the whole of Oliver be equal to a little thing like that!

"Father will have a word with you," said Scheldrup.

Oliver went home as nothing less than a big warehouseman. "How was it," he asked Petra; "didn't that Johnsen of the Wharf-side refuse to give me a job?"

"Yes. And now I'm not going to ask him any more."

Silence; oh, a silence which Oliver made immense, made fraught with destiny. "No, I'll have a word with him myself," he said and went out.

The women looked at each other. Ah, it wouldn't make any difference if Oliver did go, perhaps he wouldn't go at all. And Petra gave a scornful toss of the head.

When he came back he was silent a long while, so great in his silence. The women wouldn't take the trouble to question him, but they smiled a little and Petra went so far as to say: "I wonder who it was who went and had a word with the Consul?"

At last Oliver broke the silence and spoke: "I must have my Iceland jacket darned this evening. It'll be cold for me in the warehouse."

Petra almost shouted: "*Are* you going to the warehouse?"

And even Grandmamma stood agape.

But Oliver looked up in the greatest surprise and understood not a word, faith, women were the greatest of riddles: "Why, of course?" he replied with a query in his voice.

They clapped their hands.

"Of course I'm going to the warehouse," he said. "Any time now. I start to-morrow."

They talked it over again and again: this meant a complete change, fixed wages, prosperity, oh, it made such a lot of difference! And there he sat, the man who had brought it about,

the master, big with pride, tilting his hat like a dandy, puffing out his chest. He spoke again: "I told you I was going to have a word with him, didn't I?"

"Well, haven't I asked the Consul several times?" objected Petra.

Oliver answered: "It isn't the same thing as when a man comes along."

It meant a great change, yes. But Oliver who sat there knowing what he had agreed to thought something like this: it didn't strictly speaking mean any savings bank book or Garden of Eden; that Johnsen of the Wharfside wasn't a man to throw his money about; but on the other hand he was First Consul, so he might appear a sort of saviour to the Oliver family.

The warehouse work was not heavy, Oliver might go there day after day and simply be on the spot. His busiest days were when a cargo boat put in at the little quay and discharged flour and syrup, coffee, paraffin and linseed oil, and took in fish and train-oil in exchange; Oliver had then to get the goods stowed in warehouse and cellar and on such occasions he might succeed in being tired by evening. Otherwise his duty was to sweep and keep the place tidy. An opened bag of coffee must not be forgotten in the middle of the warehouse floor so that little boys could come and make a find of it. And when the customers appeared with a note from the shop Oliver read the note and delivered accordingly a sack of flour, twenty fathoms of rope or a certain weight of fish. It was also part of the warehouseman's job every morning to fill the drawers of the shop with groceries from the warehouse; finally he had to note down the goods of which the stock was getting low, so that the office might order a fresh supply in time.

Taken altogether it was no inconsiderable position Consul Johnsen had established for Oliver, and once more folk had reason to acknowledge his manner of dealing. It was quite true that Oliver had been crippled on board Johnsen's ship, but that en-

tailed no duty, only ordinary charity and kindness of heart. And of such things the First Consul had great store, he was a great man and a benefactor.

What was wrong then? Nothing. There might be an evil smell in the warehouse of ancient fish and rotting liver, and particularly in summer there was a superior stench about the place—was that anything to talk about! On the whole Oliver was a frugal soul as he had always been, he earned enough for margarine on his bread, lazy Sundays, a little finery, a gorgeous tie, blacking for his shoe, a new hat cocked on his ear. Consul Johnsen's generosity towards him had other more remote effects, he became aware from little things that the town no longer ignored him, and even Lawyer Fredriksen would not be behind the others, but left his house in peace.

Oh, it was prosperity that counted! But the best thing was that Oliver became Manager of his warehouse, of his little world; indeed, he was not far from being a ruler and a person of rank, so to speak. This was to his taste; it set him tingling when the people of the town came and were his customers and took him aside and wished him Good day before they presented their note. And "Good day!" he would wish them back; that was the sort of man he was, he didn't ignore anybody either. Possibly it paid to be a little polite to the cripple now; he often had a chance of being stingy or generous with his weights and measures.

Jörgen Fisherman brought him notes, Kasper, the man who had sailed in the *Fia* and now dared not leave his wife again for fear she might be tempted to fresh foreign voyages—ay, this Kasper brought him notes; Martin of the Heath brought them, Mattis the carpenter and Policeman Carlsen brought them and scores besides, and Oliver received them at the warehouse door and heard what their business was. Truly, it was like Joseph who became a great lord in the house of Pharaoh.

"Well, you've come up in the world now!" Jörgen Fisherman would say in all kindness.

"I can't complain," Oliver would reply. "Providence has placed me here and has not forgotten me."—He made over to Jörgen for all time his place in what he called the fish market: "You're just to take the whole thing, the cases and the pitch, and good luck to you! You've given me many a boiling of fish when I was queer and couldn't go to sea," he added with emotion. "As for me, God be praised, I and my family have our daily bread, and what more, for instance, do we human beings require! And your children and my children, Jörgen, they promise well, and that Frank's gone to the big school and he's getting more and more learned; it's a marvel, he can read German the moment he sets his eyes on it."

Jörgen nodded; yes, his own boys and girls spoke of Frank with deep respect.

"Oh, it's enough to knock you down, it's almost like a story-book. He can get any place he likes, he can go straight into a bank or an office, nothing less. If you'll wait a second, Jörgen, we can go home together."

Oliver took a handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped the inside of his hat, took the flour and dirt off his face, polished his shoe, brushed his clothes and let Jörgen wait. He wanted to give Jörgen a chance of seeing that he was not the same as before, that his new position was not that of every man. And Jörgen was patient and waited. Then Oliver shut the warehouse door for the night; it creaked piercingly on its hinges, but to Oliver this was a friendly sound, the warehouse door's nightly swan-song. He put the big key in his pocket and was ready.

They walked homeward, Jörgen faithfully carrying a heavy can of linseed oil and listening to Oliver's talk, which was artless and modest in the main, but full of boasting: "Ah, you're going to paint your house?"

"Yes."

"Lucky man to be able to do it yourself! I shall have to hire painters for mine, I never have time."

"No."

"But there's no denying it, my luck's turned, I can paint and smarten the place up and be in the fashion. It costs money, but that can't be helped."

Jörgen had something on his mind: "We must try and keep our boys more at home."

"Our boys? Why?"

"Last night they rowed out again. I'm scared about them at times."

"About Edevart and Abel? No, Jörgen, you needn't be!" replied Oliver with an imposing air. "Those fellows can look after themselves!"

"They often come home so late. I'd be glad if you'd refuse them the boat."

"Let the boys alone," said Oliver. "When I used to sail abroad and was in every town you can think of, I saw nothing else but small boys in boats. You ought to go to the Pacific, there they dive off boats and swim like eels."

"But then they don't learn their lessons."

The two fathers discussed this judiciously from both points of view, and Oliver was the man of more experience and the circumnavigator, to whom Jörgen was bound to listen. But all at once Jörgen said: "Ay, but it's not so sure they don't steal fish."

"Ah," said Oliver. Thereupon it occurred to him that thieving was incompatible with his new position, and he pulled up short: "Did you say they *steal* fish?"

"Not from me. But Martin of the Heath has been complaining of them."

"I'll speak to the boys," declared Oliver, and nodded to show that he would speak to them properly.

These two, Jörgen Fisherman and Oliver, had had many a chat in the course of the years, they knew each other so well that they never said Good night or anything when they parted; but now this evening Oliver says: "Won't you look in on us?"

Jörgen was dull and not very quick of comprehension; but what was his neighbour, the warehouseman, driving at?

"I don't know whether Petra may have a cup of coffee and some cookies, we might try."

"Thanks all the same, but it's too late to-night," was Jörgen's reply to this extravagance.

"As you please. Well, you must remember me at home!"

Jörgen had never heard the like—remember him at home!

When he came home he had to tell his wife of this incident, and Lydia, the rasp, was not slow at seeing through it all: "They're losing their wits," she said. "Not but what the coffee don't cost them much when they can find it in the warehouse; but cookies! And now that Petra's been up to the headmaster himself to ask if young Frank oughtn't to be a parson."

That plain, unvarnished Lydia, she was not above a trace of envy. Petra was the right one to give herself airs, she was—perhaps it was over all those brown-eyed children of hers, ha-ha! No, she needn't trouble herself. That grey cloak she had before she was married was not fit to be seen now, as might be expected; but a married woman had no right to a light fawn cloak like the one she'd just been given by Fru Johnsen, that didn't become her at all, she looked a fool in it!

Poor Petra, they were all down on her, she was after all an unfortunate creature, a tethered animal driven mad by being tied up. The worst of it was, both for herself and others, that she was so hard to please, so discontented by nature. Now she had got a home and a livelihood, husband and children, so perhaps she had not done so badly for herself, or how was it? Was she worth more? Had she any reason for not being happy with a man like Oliver who had risen to be Manager of Consul Johnsen's warehouse?

In comes Oliver and hangs the big key on its nail by the window. He had himself handed out the coppers for the baker's sweet buns and ordered them to be bought; and now they are

produced right enough, but not many, not a whole heap for him as the breadwinner; moreover Petra doesn't show a scrap of manners, but puts them down on the bare table. To give her a lesson Oliver lifts up his cup and puts the buns in the saucer, then he looks up. But Petra only looks miserable and says:

"I didn't know you were company!"

Oliver behaves like the man he is, he doesn't wrangle if he can get out of it, he gives the two little girls each a bun and has one left for himself. Ay, he's grown sweet-toothed like a woman, he enjoys his bun leisurely and drinks coffee with it; after that he falls to on his supper of black bread and margarine.

"What was it Jörgen had in the big can?" asked Petra.

"Paint oil."

"Oh, is he going to paint?"

"That must be the idea."

"Well, some folks can paint and make their place smart!" says Petra.

Silence on the part of Oliver.

Soon after she begins again: "That Mattis, he's so grand now, he's got a red letter-box on the side of his house."

"How do you know that?" asked Oliver instantly.

"How do I know it? I walked past and saw it."

"What were you doing in that part of the town?"

Petra snorts: "I suppose I've got to ask your leave to go outside my own door!"

"Why didn't you take that Mattis?" asks Oliver. "Then you'd have got a red letter-box."

Silence on the part of Petra.

The fact was that Oliver had now turned amiable and was grateful to Providence for the benefits bestowed upon him; he no longer philosophized in godless fashion over his hard fate or thought it a sin and a shame if others did not do so; he was a downright happy man, was Oliver. But Mattis the carpenter was the poison in his happiness and oh, if that man could be

removed from the face of the earth, right into the middle of the outer darkness for instance, what a blessing it would be! Ho, what a waggish imbecile was Oliver; he connected the carpenter with his little blue-eyed girl, just wait, he meant to keep an eye on the child, to see if she would grow a horse's nose.

There was really no fault to be found with Mattis the carpenter, he hadn't a name for loose living. This substantial fellow, who now owned both house and workshop and employed a journeyman and an apprentice, didn't "change his condition," he had no wife. Total bachelor. It was as though he had said to himself: No, thanks, I've been fooled once, my nose is long enough already, it don't want any pulling! He had Maren Salt to keep house for him and she was well over forty and would tempt nobody. So he stood year after year in his workshop sawing and planing with drooping mouth and looked sadder and sillier every day, but he did his work.

But the very fact that Mattis didn't marry must have made him suspicious in Oliver's eyes. What was the man up to, was he slinking round Petra? Every time the carpenter's name was mentioned he had a relapse.

"Can you tell me," he said, "what difference a letter-box makes to a house?"

"Well, it's a kind of ornament and makes it look gay. You don't see one on everybody's house."

"I've been about the world and I've seen gilt letter-boxes."

"Gilt!"

"From top to toe. And with an emperor's crown."

Oh, but Petra had heard a thousand times of all the things Oliver had seen about the world.

X

IT WAS a good thing Oliver did not take the boat from them. And what would have been said of interfering with people's means of livelihood?

The four small fish that had given rise to defamatory tattle they had found as a matter of fact on Martin's fish-box, and now they went to Martin himself and nodded and admitted it. But they had borrowed them to make up a score of frying fish that had been promised for the Doctor's kitchen. "And, if you please, here are the fish back, we've brought them of our own accord, and we'll be ready to lend you four another time, Martin!"

Poor Martin was a little sorry, so he was, for his wild talk about honest folk; he mumbled that anyhow there was no hurry about the loan.

"Oh yes," they said; "here are the fish and thanks for helping us."

But it was Oliver who had spoken to the boys as he had promised; that is to say, he had given them a whole bright crown to make it good again. Oh, Oliver was not so bad, he was good to children in his own way, and children liked him in return; Abel would occasionally buy sweeties for his father.

What could he buy them with? Why, Abel earned a little money, he fished.

The boys took a fit of being very full of their business affairs. They didn't talk of their lessons or their teachers, they discussed their balance-sheet. They kept their accounts in their heads: they might have advanced a little to a friend who was in difficulties, something might be lost at pitch-and-toss, but the rest was in hand. Neither of them was very poor, they owned both

silver and notes, but at the same time they had heavy expenses. Edevart had to keep himself in pipe-tobacco with silver paper round it, otherwise he declared he'd get seasick, and Abel, worse luck, was no better off, he had constant disbursements for treacle cakes, for pistol and caps, for red chalk to write on walls with. These were no trifles. But the boys were industrious and stuck to the boat.

Then later on when the school roped them in in earnest they ceased to be such gluttons for work, it was a shame what a lot of time and energy they were obliged to spare for their lessons. They made up for it by going about the town in search of adventures, and in this way too they met with a good many. They were particularly fond of angry people with gardens. Good-tempered people with gardens, like the Postmaster and Chandler Olsen, they didn't care for so much, but the druggist was first-rate. Last year he had shot salt at them when they pursued a mouse into his garden; this year they took their revenge, scared his chickens heartlessly, hauled down his flag halyards and kept his garden pretty clear of fruit.

They had now enlisted a third hand for these tricks, and although she was only a girl, little Lydia, a wild creature, but keen and clever, she was above all a hawk at keeping a look out and signalling danger.

Now it was this way, that Edevart was the biggest and smartest at making plans, but Abel was light and starved and therefore indispensable for climbing trees or squeezing himself through narrow holes. They had a lot of trouble to get at some splendid purple morello cherries which grew on a tall tree in the druggist's garden; the only way to do it was for Abel to get on to the roof of an outhouse and operate from there. It was late in the evening, but moonlight, all were at their posts, Little Lydia searching the surroundings with her eyes, Edevart piling empty cases for Abel to climb on, and then Abel himself went up. It took time to clamber along the steep tiled roof, but the

Squirrel got on by his nails; when at last he was astride the ridge he had a good way to go yet—and just as he was reaching the goal the hawk gave a little cough. She had seen a gleam of light from a door being opened in the house. Well, there. But now the Squirrel had reached the mark and he ventured to pause just for a second, the hawk coughed louder—suddenly the druggist was down at the outhouse. "Ah!" he yelled, "come down there, you devil! Now you'll see!"

But it was the druggist who was to see!

A shower of roof-tiles slid down on him, the Squirrel left the roof by the other side, pursued by an avalanche, pursued by the earth itself rolling after him; he did not hit the cases but came upon a paling which spitted him, and from there he jumped at last into the street, a saved but bleeding man. To add to his troubles a volley of salt came through the paling, brilliantly penetrating Abel's thin breeches. But worst of all was the druggist's laughter.

And how did the boys come off when they tried to claim the money they had lent?

They had helped one or two of their friends in distress and opened a reasonable cash credit for them, but time wore on and on and the debtors showed no sign of a willingness to repay. They were therefore given notice for a certain day and hour; a considerable crowd assembled, including the offenders, but as they were much bigger boys they only smiled at their creditors to tease them. But Edevart and Abel had make up their minds to have the business settled, if necessary by force.

Edevart first.

He went right up to Reinert, who was the son of the parish clerk and wore fashionable knickerbockers and his father's watch-chain dangling across his waistcoat—him Edevart approached perfectly correctly and as if nothing was the matter, in fact as if he was going to shake hands with him. But in this Edevart only concealed a devilish stratagem; suddenly he shot out his

arm and fist and fell headlong on his opponent. The crowd were breathless as they watched the encounter, how they rolled over and over, got on their feet again and danced all over the place, blazing at one another. Then in an unhappy moment Reinert discovered that he had lost his watch-chain, everybody began to look for it and Little Lydia, the hawk, found it in the dust. "Give it here!" shrieked Reinert. But Little Lydia knew better, she ran to her brother with it, and Edevart stuck it in his pocket. "Oh!" said the crowd. Now if Reinert had had more time he might have recaptured the chain, but he had to make for the brass-worker's so as not to come home with a broken chain. "I'll pay!" he shouted to Edevart; "I only wanted to tease you a bit!" The crowd acclaimed this decision loudly.

Now it was the turn of the Squirrel and a funny little squab they called the Drawing-pin. But when Reinert, his hero, had to quit the field of battle, there was none to steel the heart of the Drawing-pin, he saw himself left in the lurch and murmured: "I'll pay too!"

Thus they came in for adventures of one kind or another, not all of them so straightforward and honest, but all instructive and improving after a fashion.

Then there came a time when Abel grew somewhat in stature and showed a greedy appetite, while his taste for work left him; he had prematurely reached a loafing age. And this was not good for Abel. When he had exhausted his ready cash he could no longer get a private supply of food at the baker's, so he entered the service of the Borough Surveyor to run errands and chop wood in the evenings. In this employment he acquired a taste for stolen drives about the streets, hanging on to a cart by his eyebrows and ready to jump off in an instant if he was discovered. He who had never cared much for horses or driving now heard the rumble of a carriage a long way off and waited for it, and he showed no little art in making his spring at the right moment.

At the Borough Surveyor's he received besides a small wage some capital thick slices of bread and butter every evening, and they did a good deal to raise his spirits. He kept his situation month after month during the winter; meanwhile he met Edevart at school, but had no adventures with him. On the other hand he had an adventure with Little Lydia: when he was twelve years old he proposed to her.

Now he had known Little Lydia all the time to be a fine girl and had been chums with her, and besides she had lately grown very lovely and it couldn't be denied that the clerk's son Reinert showed off before her in his knickerbockers. So Abel made up his mind to act promptly.

It was Sunday, they were at Jörgen Fisherman's, the hens were walking about the little yard, Abel and Little Lydia were chatting together. She was in a smart yellow frock to-day as it was Sunday and he was the same as yesterday and every other day, but Abel didn't give that a thought. She was just declaring to him that she couldn't understand how Chandler Olsen's Ragna still cared for dolls: "If I look at my doll now it's not so much as to cast my eyes on her."

At this Abel must have thought she was so grown up that it was high time to act and he opened his heart to her. Although he spoke pretty plainly and said everything necessary, Little Lydia didn't understand him and questioned him in return. This was his worst moment. Not that he had any doubt of the answer, she would say Yes straight away, they had seen enough of each other for that. But when she had heard his business once more she frowned and said No. Flatly No.

He looked at her searchingly, to see if she was sober.

Little Lydia seemed to be thinking it over, she was rather annoyed with her suitor, indeed she was. They had been friends and known each other quite well, but to get engaged to him—no. True, he was still a bachelor, it was all right as far as that went, but actually to get engaged to him—no.

Oh, the women! Unfortunately he was so placed that at present he had nothing to set up house on but a place as errand boy to the Borough Surveyor, but he might rise, what was to prevent him rising? And she ought not to forget either that he came to her with honourable intentions, whereas there was no knowing what might await her with Reinert and his knickerbockers! But oh, the women! No, she answered and shook her head.

"Well well!" he said in reply.

He stood there flattened out and couldn't even pull himself together and go away; he would have preferred to sink into the ground. What should he have done? Taken off his cap and bowed —very well, Miss! He had to say something anyhow, a word of farewell, especially as she could not be utterly depraved. "Well well, good-bye!" he said. And when he tried to thank her for all their time together he couldn't do it, he felt his face contorted, and oh, how he pitied Little Lydia for all the sorrow and misery in store for her with Reinert.

It was a great blow to his spirits; even the Borough Surveyor's bread and butter no longer availed him, he shrank to skin and bones, was numbed by the cold, had no relish for anything; he hid in dark corners and was devoured by melancholy and discouragement. They were the worst winter months he had been through. School and lessons—well, just what he couldn't get out of. Fishing—not a thought of it. Nobody to confide in, alone in the wilderness, in sorrow and rags. And Little Lydia made no overtures? Had she so soon forgotten him? It appeared so; she seemed to avoid him. Nothing would have been easier for her than to show signs that she too was destroyed; but no, never did she come rushing up to him and throw herself on her knees in repentance.

He asked his father to let him be confirmed at once and then go to the military school. And his father talked to him about it and didn't pooh-pooh the idea; but it was a little too soon, he said, not very much too soon, but a little; they would have

to wait a few months, and a few months would be gone in a twinkling, Abel would see! Now spring was coming on and then he could go out with his father for a long trip at Easter or Whitsuntide.

But Abel no longer cared for a long trip to sea, he preferred to sit in a hole ashore and brood. What use had he now for the sea and boats and eggs from the islands and driftwood and adventures? He was far away from it all, his little craft was caught in a dead calm.

He struggled through the winter. At home he barely stayed for the night and no longer, in the daytime he had school and now and then a sickening extra lesson, in the evening he had his job at the Borough Surveyor's. It was a good thing he held together, the little warrior! Frank, his brother, went straight ahead without turning to right or left—what a difference between them! He continued to get on well and justify his scholarship; he was a shining light, everybody could see it and everybody knew that here was something out of the common. What a difference between two brothers, it was as though they did not come of the same race. They did though, Frank's parents were the same as Abel's, but to be sure his parents seemed to be no relations of his. Even at home he was odd, so serious, so fastidious and studious; with Abel he was unbearably grown-up: "You ought to know that at your age," he would say, just like a schoolmaster. He had got into the habit of impressing certain civilities upon Abel with unnecessary emphasis: "When the master comes into the class you ought to get up and bow, and when you have done that you ought to sit down again and not keep on your feet." —"Ape!" said Abel.

When Frank had passed his grammar school examination it became a question of what he was to go in for. Go in for—he? The same as before, what else! Could anyone think of extinguishing a shining light? Not with the consent of the person most concerned! But while his fate was being decided Frank was

advised by the Headmaster and the Doctor to take a bracing trip in the mountains in company with other young men who had been reading too hard. Before starting he weighed his knapsack on a steelyard and took a few things out and put a few things in to bring it to the right weight; he also weighed his shoes in his hand, they were heavy beyond the regulation, but—

Now if Abel had been as industrious and had half killed himself with reading he too might have gone on this walking tour; it would have done him a lot of good, braced him up well. But Abel was not that sort, devil a bit of it, and besides he was plunged for the time being in grief and inactivity.

One day Edevart said to him that now they must row out again, there was plenty of whiting outside. Abel appeared depressed and was game for nothing, it took his friend an hour to talk him round. And even then he didn't get Abel to join him straight away. For the fact was that Abel was a very poor hand at breaking off a connection and saying good-bye to a place, but if he was to start fishing again he would have to give notice at the Borough Surveyor's. He had had miserable pay there, the Surveyor himself had only a small salary and was poorly off, but there had been a liberal supply of bread and butter in his house and everybody had been kind to the Squirrel, so how could he suddenly walk in and say good-bye? He knew it was not to be managed without making him feel sick and so he put it off from day to day.

Then Edevart got angry and said he'd soon find another chum.

"Oh. But where will you get a boat?" asked Abel.

No, that made Edevart tame again, for it was Abel's boat, Oliver's boat.

And for the first time in a long while Abel had a chance of triumphing, of standing up and spitting like a grown-up man and being more than nothing. That would teach him, this Edevart, this brother of Little Lydia's!

However, he stuck to his old chum after all and when he

had thought more about it he seriously set about taking his leave at the Borough Surveyor's. It might have passed off fairly well if the mistress had not held his hand in so motherly a way and said: "Poor Abel, what a thin little hand you have!" He reached the street blinded with tears. Somebody called to him: "Ho-ho, have you been in and got a thrashing?" It was the Drawing-pin.

So now he was back again on his thwart and began to recover himself. You see, he had become a regular landsman and a horsey character; now he put a bridle on the boat and drove her, and when he came in for a little sea he again hung on by his eyebrows and balanced himself on the edge. Oh yes, this was a familiar life, the two chums were once more free and earning money. Trader Davidsen was a new and excellent retailer to have to deal with, he sold them splendid lines and took fish in payment. No fisherman was better equipped than they. When a week or so had gone by Abel could see a cart without being tempted by it.

But for a long time yet he was tormented by the memory of Little Lydia; he went out of his way to avoid her and never mentioned her name. No, but he got Edevart to do so, to speak her name if nothing more. Abel asked:

"Isn't that Alice walking there?"

"Where?"

"There, in the yellow frock."

"No, that's Little Lydia."

In old days he had been trusted with heavy things to carry for her when she had been out shopping and he had met her; now that was all over, he didn't even offer to do it. And especially now that the dancing mistress had come back to town and Little Lydia went to the dancing school, which Abel did not, especially now their paths diverged. Fate had intervened.

After a fortnight neither of the boys had a thought of anything but the sea. Abel's military school might be all right and they discussed it as a makeshift, but then they heard that a military school only meant more lessons and teachers. No, when once

they were confirmed they would sign on and go to sea. That was the only thing for a man.

"Where have we got to deliver the fish this evening?" asked Edevart.

"This evening I'm going to take this string home," replied Abel.

"Aren't you going to sell it?"

"No. Father asked me for a boiling to-night, because Frank's come home."

Edevart was lost in thought for a moment: "Oh, so he's come home. What do you think—if they make Frank a parson he'll be able to send us to hell."

"Send us to hell? Can he do that?"

"Yes, he'll learn to work spells."

Frank became something mystic and rather dangerous to both of them. Maybe it was best not to have too much to do with him.

XI

WHAT WAS that new sign they were putting up over Consul Johnsen's office door? Another shield or coat of arms— had he actually been made a nobleman? He had been made Belgian Consul.

People had seen that he was busy with something, had something in his eye; and so this was what it was, he was to be double as much as the other consuls, Double Consul. And what a lot it meant, another shield on the wall, another ring for Fru Johnsen with a stone in it.

When the Headmaster had read the new sign he knocked the dust off his shabby coat and entered the Double Consulate. He was pretty cunning to choose this very moment for an interview with the Consul.

He offered his congratulations in respectful and well-chosen words: So the Herr Consul had been appointed as representative by yet another Government.

Oh yes, that was so. But for that matter it only meant more work, the expenses involved were not so slight either. But one couldn't very well refuse. "To go from one thing to another, may I thank you for the care you have had of little Fia? I am glad the examination is over. She might have done rather better, no doubt, but that can't be helped now; she is not going to be a schoolteacher either."

"Since you speak of it, Fia might well be a schoolteacher, in several subjects, a teacher of others, oh yes. Herr Consul, I have come to you to-day as you are our leader in everything; I have a mission to you."

"Oh?"

"A serious mission. It concerns a pupil who must not be

checked in his brilliant career and brought to nothing. It is Frank, son of Oliver."

"What about him?"

"You have given him clothes year after year and you have shown great interest in the whole family—"

"By no means!" interrupted the Consul.

The Headmaster looked at him in surprise: "First you had his mother—"

"In my service. Quite so. Petra, she was in our service."

"Yes. And since then you have provided the father with employment. I consider therefore that your benefactions to this family have been many and great. But now the time has come when Frank is in need of help, urgently in need of help. Give him your further assistance, Herr Consul!"

To begin with the Consul was by no means delighted at this application; on the contrary, his brow contracted. He was the first man in the town, he had now risen as high as he could go and probably had no desire to be greater than he was; therefore he said to the schoolmaster: "When you reckon up my benefactions—as you are kind enough to call them—do you think there is any reason to apply to me again?"

"We should like so much to begin with the first name in the town, afterwards we can try the others. But we are fully aware that in so doing we are—well, we are—taking unfair advantage of the generosity of a man who can scarcely say no."

"What is the boy to be?"

"He can be what he will, such is his industry and application. But languages are his special talent."

The Consul meditated, gazed into vacancy and meditated; then he said these remarkable words: "It might be misunderstood if I gave the family further help."

"Misunderstood?"

"Give occasion for gossip. Haven't you heard comments already?"

"How do you mean?"

The Consul turned it off; so the Headmaster had heard nothing of a certain box on the ears. He said therefore: "Oh yes, there are ill-natured comments, it's no use denying it. I perform my little acts of charity from sheer love of ostentation, they say."

The Headmaster had never heard such nonsense, never. Ah, but a man like the Consul must ignore that sort of thing, ignore it utterly. All the better elements in the town were on his side.

They went on discussing it and the Consul was not yet easy about scandal, about public opinion, but finally he yielded so far as to say: "Well—I suppose I shall have to lend a helping hand."

Now it was perhaps the Headmaster's turn to feel uneasy, but he showed it in a cautious manner: "Ah, many thanks, I knew I should not come here in vain. Oh, this is an opportunity for people who have the power to act magnanimously. Otherwise this young man's exceptional ability will be lost to the intellectual life of the country."

"Well, it was a helping hand you wanted?"

"Yes, precisely. The kind of generosity which you are pleased to call a helping hand. It is a question, you see, of an annual allowance to keep the boy during his student years."

The Consul cannot have intended to go so far as this; he said: "Hm!" and wagged his head demurringly.

A gloved hand knocked at the door and Fru Johnsen stepped in: "Excuse me, I shan't be a moment!"

Oh, wasn't it the most unlucky chance for the Consul that his wife should come in just now! And of course the schoolmaster in his simplicity must needs initiate her into his great plan for the boy Frank. "I see," said the lady; "I see," she said.

But as it happened her presence was the very thing to help the plan. Fru Johnsen too must have been in something of a festival humour to-day, since she was now double as much as the other ladies; she looked across to her husband and said: "Well, no doubt you will have to step in here."

The Consul's mind was relieved, whatever may have been the reason; so now he positively had his wife's backing in a deed of charity to the Oliver family. "It's a great blessing to have a discerning wife," he said. "I wanted to hear your opinion, Johanna."

"We know what Fru Johnsen is!" exclaimed the Headmaster.

Was this too much for her, couldn't she stand so much? It made her stupid enough to ask: "Has the boy renewed the promises of his baptism?"

"He is to be confirmed now. And then it was the idea that he should go to college at once."

The Consul asked: "Who else had you thought of getting to join in this?"

"The two consuls, Olsen and Heiberg—"

"Oh, I think not," said the lady.

"No, no, perhaps not. Then we had thought of Lawyer Fredriksen. He owns Oliver's house, he ought to be able to present this house to the fund."

But now Consul Johnsen was sufficiently elated by his wife's attitude to shrug his shoulders and say: "Oh, what a lawyer! He's gone in for politics now and is trying to be elected; let him work away at that, he's not fit for much else."

To this the Headmaster agreed with a respectful smile. But then he mentioned Henriksen, they would try to get Henriksen to join.

"What Henriksen?" asked the lady.

"Henriksen of the Shipyard."

"Oh him." Fru Johnsen forgot how to spell his name sometimes.

"Well, there's not so much to smile at," said the Consul to keep his wife in hand.

But Fru Johnsen didn't seem able to stand very much today, she couldn't stand being kept under, for instance, and her face stiffened.

The Consul went on: "No, but the important thing is that it's by no means certain how much Henriksen has to give away."

His wife watched her chance: "Well, we don't know anything about that. But we don't visit them."

The Headmaster was on hot coals till he had things smoothed over again. They all three talked of the Henriksens of the Shipyard and agreed that they were good ordinary people in their way, but of course they were rather outside their sphere, rather uncultivated, and the man was fond of a glass.

"Well, so much for that," Fru Johnsen broke off at last; "I only came in to get a scrap of paper from you."

The Consul went to his safe, "One scrap?" he asked.

"Yes. If it's big enough."

When his wife had gone the Consul sat down again to confer with the Headmaster: "A yearly allowance, yes. That is really what I meant by a helping hand. Have you spoken to the Doctor about this?"

"Yes. And he would like to join according to his means. But I don't suppose he has much."

"No, what has he! No, look here, I may as well say it at once: I'll be responsible for these expenses. You can go home and sleep on that."

"Oh!"

"I'll do that," repeated the Consul, getting up. "I will give this helping hand, this annual provision, alone."

The Headmaster got up in his turn and muttered, overwhelmed: "In this I recognize the Herr Consul!"

And so the boy Frank was saved from relapsing into his environment, into the darkness from which he had raised himself. Everything was arranged, the Headmaster was able to enjoy his triumph, was able to stop every better element in the street and tell him the news, was able to go personally to Oliver's house and announce it. It was a happy day for him, as though he himself had once more achieved a brilliant university degree; he knew

no greater joy than to be able to do good in this way and assert the superiority of scholarship, it was his livelihood and his passion. Some passion a man must have; there are those who brave fire and water to be able to conjugate verbs.

The Headmaster would come across a party of schoolboys returning from their walking tour; the boys are worn out with their exertions, sorefooted, sunburnt, annoyed over mad bulls and irascible farmers. They recognize the Headmaster a long way off, salute him, wave their hands to him. The biggest boys are free of him now, he it was who presided over the torture while they were growing lads; oh, it was for their own good, he armed them for life, armed them for agriculture, fishery, cattle-breeding, commerce, industry, art, family life, dreams and the worship of God, but now they are free of him, they have passed their examination and are to try their armour in the fight. Here they go, conscientiously treasuring up in their little brains the superficial area of Switzerland and the dates of the Punic Wars, they scale the mountains with the following piece of natural history in their hearts—fish are vertebrates! they limp home again with their first experience of a feeble circulation. The Headmaster meets them, meets these children when perhaps he ought rather to meet with adventures; he is himself an old man with the brain of a boy of sixteen, he is half-starved and shabby, his coat hangs on him as on a coat-hanger, the loop shows above his collar, but there he comes, the Headmaster of the school, the director of the great stone house.

"How have you got on with your trip?"

So—so, bulls, farmers—

"You must rise above such things, rise far above them. Would you like to hear a piece of good news?"

"Yes, yes."

"Frank is to go to college!"

Some of the children are clever enough to pretend this is the best news they could hear, others are indifferent, one or

two envious. Reinert, for instance, in his knickerbockers, it is easy for him to show pleasure, since he knows that about the fish and has excellent linguistic attainments of his own. The boy Frank in person is not devoid of interest in the news, his scorched face turns even darker for an instant, but his knees don't give way under him. No, for he has been given things before, been helped and raised up by others all these years, he has never been compelled to shift for himself, there was always a way out, everything came right! And was he now to be specially thrilled with a great joy? Frank? Why, the boy had never rejoiced, never for a single day. He had worked hard at school and had felt a satisfaction in being esteemed for his industry and vanity, that was all. No, he knew nothing of red explosions, he was never on the summits and fell down, never at the bottom and floated up, he exposed himself to no dangers and had none to ward off; instead of getting out of a tight corner he avoided it. Wisely done, poorly done. God had equipped him for a philologist.

He takes his leave of them and walks home; he will get fresh fish for supper and that ought to do him good. His father is there, Abel too for once in a way is in the family circle; the useless old tom-cat prowls round and round miaowing at the smell of fish.

Something strange seemed to have entered the house—Frank is a greater oddity than before. Now he was to be confirmed and leave the place. His grandmother was speechless about it and already treated him as a sinful member of the congregation treats the parson. Perhaps she thought this would turn out to her profit one day, in the confessional.

Oliver sat at the table with the smallest girl on his lap and Petra with the next smallest, and they all ate. Oliver was a little depressed, he babbled to the little one to make the atmosphere rather less solemn: "She's such a little one," he says, "and she's Papa's girl, there's nothing big or dangerous about her, she's

just a good little thing. Whose girl are you? Papa's girl, yes, I guessed that."—Now and then he put a morsel in the child's mouth, but the rest of the time he looked after himself. He would polish off his food greedily, would Oliver, if Petra didn't preserve a firm attitude to him. "Well well, it's young Abel we can thank for the fish this evening," he said.

As if that were anything important and not absolutely indifferent!

Petra was full of the event that had befallen the household and she made Frank answer her questions.

"College," said Oliver with a dignified nod; "ay, that's the way!" But unfortunately he didn't know enough about it to discuss it further, and as soon as he had finished eating he played with the child again and gave it the white angel for a doll. Now there wasn't much left of the ornaments on the chest of drawers, they had been used too much for playing with the children, and as to the little pocket mirror in a brass frame, it had not been lost, but Oliver had pinched it so that he could look at his face in the warehouse. That ruined man, that womanish creature, he wanted a glass to see himself in!

He waited till there was a chance of being heard and was all ready to make an announcement. What was the news he was bursting with? That Johnsen of the Wharfside had been made Double Consul? Well, that was one thing, that was the first thing. But suddenly he said to Petra: "They were talking about a big party that's to be given at Johnsen's."

Oliver would now and then come home with a message to his wife, that perhaps they wanted her for something at Johnsen's, the mistress had hinted at it, Scheldrup had dropped a word, sometimes the Consul himself might have work for her. Occasionally there was nothing in it, it was a "misunderstanding" on Oliver's part and it might happen that he had invented the whole thing. But every time Petra got one of these messages

she dressed herself up and went out; it didn't hurt anybody and at any rate she got a little time to herself.

"Oh, are they going to have a party again?" she asked.

"Why yes, now he's Double Consul. You'll get word of it."

"Then perhaps they want me to help?"

"Yes. Or perhaps it was that you were to come and scrub the office this evening. I couldn't hear exactly."

Petra went. Grandmamma stayed behind with the little girls, otherwise the house was deserted. Oliver sneaked after his wife and kept a jealous eye on her to see if she was really directing her steps to the Johnsens'. She was used to that, she knew he was behind her at every street corner and she averted all scandal by turning neither to the right hand nor to the left.

Abel was not sitting at home either. He had found an elegant whip-handle and had hidden it under the doorstep; now he took it out and examined it, a plaited whip-handle, tough and handy, he saw in an instant what use he could make of it and at any rate he could carry it in his hand and crack it. There was a fine brass cap at the butt. He knew all the coachmen of the town and was pretty sure which of them had lost his whip, but unfortunately Abel was not so situated that he could honestly go to the owner with it. He went across to Jörgen Fisherman.

Oh, why could he never stop hanging about that house, that Eden from which he had been expelled! Why didn't Edevart live somewhere else!

But wasn't that Edevart who was just crossing the street a block ahead? And wasn't this the Borough Surveyor coming towards him?—could Abel run past him and catch up his friend?

"Good day, Abel," said the Surveyor. "Look here, I have a suspicion you were the one who hung a string of fish on my back-door once or twice lately. I want to pay you for the fish," he said, taking out his purse.

"No—er—it wasn't—" stammered Abel.

"What? My wife is certain it was you."

"It was only one or two little ones," said Abel.

The Surveyor handed out a crown—he hadn't very much to give away. "It was very nice of you," he said.

They parted and Abel went on to Jörgen's house, but his eyes were dimmed after what the Surveyor had said.

The hens had gone to roost, the back yard was silent. But as Abel put his head in and saw Little Lydia he called out at random: "Edevart!"

Little Lydia answered: "Ugh, how you startled me, you young crow!"

"I was only looking for Edevart."

"Come here! Edevart's just gone out again. What have you got in your hand? Edevart came home and got something to eat and then he went out again. Come here, I tell you!"

"Young crow yourself!" said Abel suddenly.—There was no mistake about it, those were his actual words.

Until now Little Lydia had been kneeling in front of a chair with her writing things; now she got up and there was not a trace of anger left in her, only regret at her hasty words: "You mustn't mind what I said," she told him, and showed signs of resorting to tears as usual.

Who could withstand this? Abel was too bashful to offer her downright consolation, but he went so far as to ask: "What have you been writing?"

"Letters. Look at my fingers!" she said, holding up her inky fingers. "And goodness me, what a state I'm in!" she cried, shaking the sand from her frock.

There was no more trouble between them and Little Lydia chattered on: "You can be glad you haven't so many letters to write. Can you write letters?"

"I don't know."

"I made so many girl friends at the dancing school that I have to write to. Is that a stick you've got there?"

"Don't you see what it is? It's to beat clothes with."

Little Lydia bent it and tried it in the air and nodded; it was first-rate.

"You can have it," he said.

So it was done.

They chatted about one thing and another and Little Lydia was the one who was big and grown-up: she had so much to do in the daytime that she was worn out at night with all the sewing and ironing and housework. "Do you know what I was just thinking?" she said.

"No."

"Well, it doesn't matter. But now Mamma will be calling directly and then it'll be too late if you have anything to say to me."

It came upon him so unexpectedly, he shrank to nothing. What should he say? What did she mean?

"Yes!" cried Little Lydia suddenly in a voice that rang through the house and in she ran.

But Abel hadn't heard a soul calling her.

Another ruined evening, an evening of sheer misery. A couple of days later that driver had got on the track of his beautiful whip and came and got it back. And then indeed Abel was pretty well finished for life.

XII

THE YEARS go by; the young people are confirmed and shoot up and are tall and grown up, more than usually grown up, now that the fashion for excessively high heels has set in.

And there was Fia Johnsen, just as tall as her mother, with her brown eyes and pale complexion, a pretty figure of a girl; her freckles had nearly faded out and she had a long plait hanging down her back. People had watched her grow up, they remembered her being born, it was extraordinary what a memory they had, they even knew what she wore at her confirmation, the women would stand round the pump and spread themselves about all the white gauze she had on. It was a good thing to be Fia Johnsen.

Her brother Scheldrup Johnsen was in one country after another learning his business, his fellow-townsmen lost sight of him from time to time; but Fia was at home. She learnt to dance and play the piano and dust the drawing-room and make herself useful. She had a taste for drawing and painting; she it was who made a study of the illustrated papers and magazines in the Consul's house and she it was who had painted the show-plates which still hang round all the dining-room walls. "My daughter's work!" the Consul is in the habit of saying to his guests.

Her talent was first developed by the local drawing-master, afterwards she went to bigger towns and capitals and learnt more, and each time she came home again she could smile with a more expert air, at the show-plates. Now she was so advanced that she could paint without any help the view from her windows and bits of the garden. Good. But Fia was so young and so dis-

tressingly thin, not a sign of rich feeding, but undeveloped, no muscles, no hard work. What ought she to go in for—her talent? Her parents could afford to keep her at home or keep her abroad, just as she pleased, and wherever she was she was pretty and charming and ran upstairs two at a time, didn't she? But that was all. She had no need of a calling. Her talent was a superfluity. Life had no seriousness for her.

"She ought to get some proper work to do," said the Doctor. He had said that for several years to the annoyance of her parents. Work? What work was their daughter to do?

"Would you like her to go out as a servant girl?" asked the Consul.

"She'd be no use for that."

"Not even that!"

"No. But take off her diamond rings and set her to work in the garden."

"I have a regular man for that. Poor Fia, you see, works hard at her own things, and now she wants to go at it properly for a while and give an exhibition."

"Oh, God!" said the Doctor.

The two gentlemen were sitting in C. A. Johnsen's office, in the Double Consulate, and thus the Consul was debarred from taking his departure. "My daughter has not troubled you very much with her art," he said. "On the other hand, some of the critics have expressed their approbation of it."

"Yes, we know all about that. But what the devil has the child to do with art when she's getting into a wretched state of health?"

"She'll grow out of that."

"That's not so sure."

Strange that Consul Johnsen always stood so much from the Doctor—that in all these years he had never been bold enough to show him the door a single time! Professional authority? What had the Consul to do with that, more than anyone else?

Of course the Doctor's social standing in the town was immense, no doubt of that; but could it be compared in any way with that of the Consul himself? It was indeed a mystery to everybody that the Doctor dared to speak in such an offhand way to a mighty man.

And just now Consul Johnsen was less prepared than usual to put up with annoyances, he had enough of them already. He spared the Doctor's feelings as far as possible: "Her parents must hope that Providence will be more charitable to Fia than you are, Doctor. Won't you light another cigar before you go?"

"Thanks, I will, when I go. If you went to work with Fia in the right way she wouldn't need to depend so much on the charity of Providence. How is it, won't she be getting married some day?"

"Supposing she did, would you consider her suitable for it?"

"A man expects to marry a woman and not a painter."

The Consul said with a smile: "All I can see is that she must acquire the qualities of a married woman later on. In any case that question will not arise for some years. At present she is devoting herself to art."

"I suggest," said the Doctor, "that if she had not been able to afford this amusement she would have had to become a far more efficient female human being. Or let me suggest that she may not always be able to afford it."

The Consul smiled again: "Then you will have to provide for her."

"I only suggest it, I tell you."

The Doctor's obtrusiveness was past bearing, and if the Consul had known the real cause of this obtrusiveness on this particular day he might perhaps—after all—have shown his visitor the door. It was all about that new diamond ring Fia had been given, a ring that left no peace for the Doctor's wife. What business had the child with a thing like that? She ought to be going in short skirts still, that she ought. And what about the poor little

diamond ring which the Doctor's wife had herself been showing off for many years past? Oh, it was all so dull and dreary! The same life day after day, with never any excitement.

But the Consul sat there in ignorance of what had been fought out between the Doctor and his wife, and presumably he must have found some sense in his visitor's words, since they caused him to reflect. He was fond of Fia and desired her good above all; no doubt he treated her rather too indulgently, her stays in foreign towns cost more and more money, but that was a necessary consequence of her education, he could not pull her up and put her to shame in the eyes of the new friends and acquaintances she had made. In her kindness she had taken to buying pictures by other painters in order to help them, but at this her father was obliged to protest, there was no sense in it, her expenses were heavy enough without it, and his purse was not inexhaustible. Good; Fia bowed her head and corrected this fault in herself; but she retained in secret certain other, oh, merely petty faults, mere trifles to set against all the good and becoming virtues she possessed. When in company she made a graceful and ladylike appearance, though perhaps rather too tall. She liked to let it be guessed that she came from a home with a tradition of culture and riches—and in this her deception may well have been half self-deception. When she missed the mail boat she would say to the bystanders: "If only I had our own steamer here!" Alas, their own steamer could scarcely afford to take Fröken Fia for trips; moreover she was a tub that could only do eight knots and as a rule only earned five per cent and now and then lost two.

And just now she was losing again.

The good Consul was not always a good shipowner, and it was the true art of shipping that Scheldrup was now gone abroad to learn. It appeared that it was not the same thing to manage a cargo steamer as sending an oil-laden schooner across the North Sea to fetch coal. The *Fia* did not show a profit

every trip, she did not joggle her eight knots from one success to another. But it was not only the loss; the *Fia* was proving a trial in other ways besides. There was now a bother with the crew, complaints of the food, desertions; the Consul could not understand why the same victuals would not do just as well this year as all the other years. It annoyed him.

And then an incredible piece of news had reached him, that Trader Davidsen of all people had been made a Consul—only single Consul, it was true, but still Consul. So there were no limits at all. Davidsen who moved here from the neighbouring town twenty years ago and was still reckoned a new-comer by the genuine natives; who many a time stood and served behind the counter himself; who sold toy fishing-tackle to children and coarse ropes and sail-cloth to the ships, all common stuff with no dry goods or hardware. At Johnsen's of the Wharfside the shopmen wore linen collars; at Davidsen's they had to have their sleeves rolled up and be ready to handle a coil of rope. This might be all right, hard work is no disgrace; but there was nothing consular or diplomatic about it.

Was this the end of the Consul's vexations? Yet one more: there was a worry about Oliver, the warehouseman. How? He'd been juggling with the weights. To his own advantage? Not a bit; to the Consul's advantage. That might be all right, faithful service is no disgrace; but it wouldn't do to cheat. It had come about in this way: Mattis the carpenter had brought him a note for two stone of pollard, and when Oliver came to weigh out the meal he must have forgotten his fat little finger somewhere about the stone weight. There must have been a substantial dead weight in that little finger, since Mattis conceived a suspicion and went off to Chandler Olsen to get his purchase weighed again. Just as he thought: a serious short weight!

Now of course Mattis the carpenter did quite the wrong thing when he went straight out of the place with his sack of meal; he ought to have struck his forehead and "forgotten" his

purse down at the shop, so that he could have enticed one of the shopboys up to the warehouse to check the weight. But Mattis was stupid and straightforward, he followed his big nose and began at once to make a row, and what was the use of that? He ran all over the town from one weigh-house to another and got his sack of meal weighed and didn't forget to tell them why. In the end he came back to Johnsen of the Wharfside and by now he was smothered with flour and more than ordinarily infuriated. It chanced that Olaus the grazier was in the shop and Olaus was in great form today, fed full with brandy, lined with brandy. To begin with he was dull and absent, but when he heard the carpenter's story his consciousness suddenly came to life on a new basis and he too raised his voice: "What's that? Short weight?"

"Short weight!" said the carpenter. "I've proved it!"

Berntsen the chief clerk tried to hush them: "You mustn't make such a noise, the Consul's in the office."

"I'd be glad if he'd come out," said Mattis.

"Out with the Consul!" yelled Olaus.

"Look here, Olaus, here's a fill of tobacco and now you can go!" said the clerk. "Come along, Mattis, come with me."

They went round to the warehouse.

Oliver took it quite nicely, he was forbearing with the infuriated carpenter. What reason could they two have for going for one another with swindling and spitefulness? It made him laugh. Did Mattis think that he—Oliver—bore him a grudge for anything? It made him laugh again. If any mistake had been made it was just inadvertence, it might happen to anybody.

"It's not the first time I've noticed it," said Mattis.

Oliver looked at him sideways and answered: "As to that you'll have to be a little careful of your tongue. You may be asked to bring witnessess to it."

Shopman Berntsen weighed the sack, filled up what was wanting and gave good weight: "That's how you ought to weigh out

for Mattis!" he said, to settle the dispute. "It was not fair of you to run round the town with your sack, Mattis; you should have got your rights here on the spot."

"Ah, but you see I got angry, it wasn't the first time."

"You hear that, Berntsen!" said Oliver, calling him to witness.

But Berntsen was an old tradesman and walked warily; Mattis the carpenter was no bad customer and moreover he was an employer with journeyman and apprentice. He owned a house, but not a home, he had only Maren Salt; but then Mattis was not a negligible quantity and now he had been elected on the Town Council. "You'll have to go easy, Oliver!" Berntsen warned him. "The mistake is yours, as I understand, and I think I can tell you from the Consul that you mustn't make mistakes with the weight."

Thus ended that affair.

The matter had been reported to the Consul, and of course he was personally above suspicion, but it gave him annoyance. So people ran about the town and got his weights checked! And the very fact that anybody should dare to stand in his shop and call: "Out with the Consul!" It was all of a piece with the crew of the Fia complaining of their food. No, the good old spirit had vanished from the earth. Everything was being levelled downward, the boundary-lines were obliterated, people were beginning to rub up against him, to try and mix with him, a doctor imagined he could say what he liked in his presence. And then these consuls springing up in every street!

The Doctor, therefore, might have found a more convenient hour than the present for putting the Consul's long-suffering to the test.

There was a knock at the office door, and as the Consul did not answer, the Doctor called: "Come in!" The Doctor went as far as that. Only a few years ago Consul Johnsen would have said Stop! to this; formerly he was not so defenceless, but now he seemed in some way or other secretly cowed. What

in the world had he to fear? Did the Doctor know something about him; this quack of a district physician, had he a rod in pickle for the Double Consul?

In walked the Druggist. He was a small and nervous man, pale, with hardly any hair on his face, a well-to-do person, married, but childless and with the air of a bachelor, stained about the clothes, smelling of medicines and tobacco.

"Good day!" he said.

"Do you think so?" said the Doctor. "I think it's a wretched day."

The Druggist shook hands with the Consul and thanked him for their last meeting. He passed on to the Doctor and said: "Let me shake hands with you too."

"You mean, if I will allow you."

This must have been the man's idea of a joke and he did not accept the other's hand.

The Consul offered his visitor a cigar. Whereupon he positively had to set to work on some big sheets of paper before him, read them here and there, arrange them in order and then scatter them over the table again.

"I see you're busy," said the Druggist. "I'll go directly."

"It's these consulates I've been saddled with," said the Consul.

"Yes, I suppose it isn't all beer and skittles."

"I'm just busy with the reports to my Governments; I assure you it's quite a piece of work."

It may well be that the Consul said this half in jest, but he was dignified enough and it looked as if his honorary appointments were very burdensome.

"Your Governments?" asked the Doctor. "That's hard luck, have you got more Governments? I thought you had only one, like myself—the Norwegian."

At any rate the Consul could do this much: he could ignore the Doctor and ask the Druggist if he wanted a really good wine, a Madeira, such and such a vintage.

"What's the price? No, then it's too dear for the store. But I can take four dozen for the house."

He doesn't offer it to me! must have been the Doctor's thought. The Shopkeeper, the Jew! he was saying to himself. "Where is Scheldrup at present?" he asked aloud.

"At Havre. Why do you ask?"

"When is he coming home?"

"I don't know. I expect he'll stay some time yet."

"It's nine months since he was here last."

The Consul thought for a moment and said: "Yes, that's right."

"That's right, yes," the Doctor repeated. Then he yawned without ceremony and got up to knock off his cigar ash on the polished top of the stove.

"Here you are, there *is* an ash-tray," said Consul.

"Oh, I'm sorry!"—The Doctor went to the window and looked out into the street. How determined he was to be supercilious, how could he turn his back on a double consulate!

"Can I be of any service to you gentlemen today?" asked the Consul.

The Druggist thanked him and called out: "Come along, Doctor! We mustn't take up the Consul's time any longer."

"I was watching the children outside," said the Doctor without hurrying himself and without turning round. "Another little girl with brown eyes, that must be one of Oliver's." Then he turned and addressed the Druggist: "Don't you think we're getting a lot of brown-eyed children in our town?"

The Druggist flinched: "Oh? Well, I don't know."

"And another specimen arrived yesterday."

The Druggist flinched again, but said in nervous eagerness: "Another specimen? Well, what is one to say?"

"At Henriksen's of the Shipyard again. That is, of course, Fru Henriksen's. It makes Number Two with the brown eyes for her."

The Druggist was on tiptoe to get the Doctor to say more: "What do you say? It's a case of Jacob's wands. Wasn't there something about white wands and black wands?"

The Doctor buttoned up his coat and prepared as coolly as possible to go. "What is one to say, you ask? Well, one can hold one's tongue. It's no miracle, either in one house or the other, it's pure nature. These blue-eyed couples have brown-eyed children from a brown-eyed father, whoever he may be."

"You don't say so!"

"Don't I say so? And this is no case of atavism. I've made some inquiries; there are no brown eyes on either side of the family, for a fair number of generations at any rate."

"Well, I'm damned—if I may say so!"

The Consul's share of the conversation was to give a little laugh now and then or to say Hm! Otherwise he stood quietly waiting for the gentlemen to take their leave.

"Well now, it's too bad, Consul!" The Doctor said good-bye at last. Then, turning to the Druggist: "It's a bore, though; if that Madeira had been delivered I could have gone home with you and tasted it."

"I shall send it up this afternoon," said the Consul.

At the door the Doctor had one more word to say: "Think of what I said about Fröken Fia, Consul. Let us get her strong and healthy! I have a sort of little private weakness for the charming young lady."

The Consul was left alone, staring at his big sheets of paper, arranging them in order and scattering them again. What had those two men come about? Had their casual meeting here roused a suspicion within him? Had they made a rendezvous to set on foot some manœuvre against the Double Consul?

His expression grew firmer and firmer. When the Druggist knocked at the door it was the Doctor who called "Come in," lest his worthy ally should go away again. A plot! A conspiracy!

Suddenly the Consul opened the door to the shop and said to Berntsen, his chief clerk: "Make out the Doctor's bill, he asked for it."

But even after Consul Johnsen had given this order he was not rid of the whole business, intrusive thoughts had entered his head. You see, he couldn't take everything lightly as he used; troublesome reflections would now break in on him and blunt his working powers. The reports could wait; why shouldn't Berntsen write them?

He went to the looking-glass, put on his hat, mimicked his careless mien of former days and started for the post office with a batch of letters that were ready.

XIII

NO DOUBT he was yielding to a feeling of indecision in leaving his work in the middle of office hours; he was taking cover. Carrying his own letters to the post was only a pretext, it was a thing one of his shopboys usually did. It was a pretext again when he took to studying the steamer time-table on the wall of the post office; this was to give the staff time to warn the inner office that Consul Johnsen was there in person.

The Postmaster came out with a look of surprise and interrogation in his eyes; could he be of any assistance to the Consul?

No, thanks. Oh well, if the Postmaster had time to look up a certain registered letter in his books; it contained a cheque, the Consul had had no word of it since.

They went into the inner office and settled the matter at once; afterwards they sat talking. It was rather chilly in here, with a smell of sealing-wax and stamping-ink, the walls were hung with colour-washed drawings of houses for God and men, of separate towers and gates, details of friezes, carving, handsome doors, stoves, all works of free fancy. Outside the window the garden was filled with great lilac bushes.

Here the Consul sat in a wooden chair listening to a strange chattering, so different from that which buzzed about him every day. Was this the kind of thing he had come for? In the ordinary way the Postmaster bored everyone to death, the Doctor ran from him: "God has not bestowed on me patience to listen to all that innocuous stuff," the Doctor was in the habit of saying. Consul Johnsen had seated himself in that chair; he must have been tired or distraught.

Oh, what a chatterbox that Postmaster was, as well-meaning as possible, but tiresome and as good as gold; he was not a

scrap better than Blacksmith Carlsen, with the sole difference that the blacksmith hardly ever spoke and worried other people, but was only idiotically happy in his own company. Happy in such a world as this! Maybe these two were not much better than the women at the pump—oh, they were themselves two women at the pump, that's just what they were, only that their gossip was religious; but their souls were full of the same womanly simplicity. They had achieved an understanding of life which served them; the Postmaster had actually arrived at his point of view by philosophical methods. At times, of course, life's happenings might come and give them a slap in the face, but this did not seem to alter their outlook—as, for instance, with Blacksmith Carlsen whose children had turned out so badly, but who stuck to his religious principles and continued to thank God for good and evil. Was not this the faith of Israel? It was quite possible that the two men were right, people thought, that they were models and examples; but that made no difference to the town, the town remained the little crawling ant-hill it was, and this in itself must have been a proof that life itself went its way in spite of all theories, perhaps in spite of religious theories above all. Was not the outlook then hopeless for two religious men in the whole town, and how was it they did not join with all the rest?

Perhaps the Postmaster had come in for something cheerful today, God knows, but it may have been so; at all events he was in a capital humour. It didn't take much to cheer him up, he was easily satisfied; the mere fact that his eldest son passed his mate's examination the other day and got a ship at once made the father as happy as a fool. Was that kind of mate's job such a splendid thing? "There's a depth in the boy," said the Postmaster; "what letters he writes to us! All the same. I don't know which to call the best of our children; now there's the one who is working on the land. He saves some of his wages and sends it to his sisters to buy good shoes with. That's a man! I

daren't shake hands with him any more, he squeezes mine to a jelly, ha-ha, a regular bear. And you ought to see him untying a knot; he has nails like tweezers, but sometimes he takes his teeth to it. You never saw such teeth!—Scheldrup is still at Havre?"

"Yes," replied the Consul.

"I see that from the letters the Doctor wrote to him yesterday."

"Did the Doctor write to him?"

"Yes. And Fia, how pretty she is, and such nice manners she has! My wife stood at the window one day looking at her and she called to me to come. I beg your pardon, you were going to say something?"

"No, it's nothing."

"I went for a long walk into the country early this morning; well, it was the road you drive to your country house. You know, it takes you all at once into the forest, it's like the end of the world, straight into the forest, and then another world begins, a vast and well-disposed world, packed with stillness, but full of little sounds all the same. I left the road so as not to meet anyone and walked by the side of it, but then, I declare, there was a man sitting under the trees. He had seen me, so I couldn't turn aside; he sat there playing on a mouth-organ. A queer man, a labourer, a tramp. I talked to him a long time. He was not particularly intelligent, his talk was of food and money, but there he sat playing his mouth-organ, poor fellow.—'What are you sitting here for?' I asked.—'Ain't I allowed to?' he asked in return. —'Yes.'—'Well, what's it got to do with you?' he replied.—'Nothing. But go on playing.'—'What'll I get for it?' he asked.—'Some coppers. I'm Postmaster of this town and I handle a lot of money in the course of the year, but it isn't mine.'—'Oh, I guess you stick to a letter now and then,' said he.—'How could I do that? I should be sent straight to jail.'—'No,' he said, 'the swells all stick together. It's only us that's on the road that have to pay for it.'—This was such silly talk and I explained to him that I

had my salary and if it was sufficient I really had all I required. No, that he didn't understand, he never made it go far enough, if he earned the price of a pair of shoes he hadn't anything for trousers and vice versa. With these farmers it was nothing but drudgery, he said. When he came and asked for food they gave him work first, heavy work, wood-chopping, the heaviest work there was in summer. In the evening they gave him stirabout and milk, without bread and butter, without cream to it, which they could well afford, the clodhoppers! A dissatisfied person he was, one of the dull and gloomy sort. If we assume that we human beings are subject to an evolutionary principle, this man had not gone very far; perhaps he had already been on earth an untold number of times, but he had hardly made the most infinitesimal progress. So he returns to the darkness every time practically unchanged, and then comes back to life and begins over again."

"Do you believe that is the way of it?" asked Consul Johnsen.

"What is one to believe? We can't very well assume an unjust first cause, it entails too many difficulties; we must assume a just one. And we can't assume that a just first cause has condemned this tramp to eternal misery from the beginning. Originally, then, we are all on an equal footing and have the same chances; some use them, others abuse them. The work we do on ourselves in this earthly life will be to our advantage in the next, and if we work downwards we shall be put back. It must be for that reason we unfortunately cannot distinguish any change in human nature during historic times; we have neglected our chances."

"So you believe we die and come back to earth many times?"

"What is one to believe? We are given chances again and again. The first cause has plenty of time, it has eternity within itself, and as we are a part of the first cause, we never perish. But the thing is that we do not come back here in the same state every time; we have it in our own power to improve our condition in our next existence."

"So that your man will get his bowl of cream?"

The Postmaster smiled: "This sort of thing only concerns him now, at his present point of view. What I am talking about, on the other hand, is his disposition, his psychical temperament. And here we arrive at a thing which is of some significance: this man sat there playing on his mouth-organ. And yet he must have done some work on himself in former existences. He played me songs and ditties, played them splendidly, I never heard the like. It isn't his skill I'm talking about, but the very fact that he did it, that he sat in the wood and played. And now listen to this: he told me about a kind of Æolian harp he had seen at a Jew's; it had strings of different thickness and of different metal, steel, copper, brass and silver, and there were little balls hanging from it which the wind carried against the strings, giving them a soft blow. And so the Æolian harp played. It was queer to hear such words in the mouth of this man. No, he had not been standing still altogether in his life upon earth, he had cultivated a little bit of garden in himself and grown a single flower. So the thing is whether he will behave himself this time in such a way that this bit of garden will be bigger in his next existence."

"Surely the whole of this theory must depend on whether you can begin with a personal first cause."

"Where are we to begin, you ask? Is there not a cause even of the first cause? We pull up in time and assume this personal first cause. It is impossible to get on without it. The question of course is beyond our apprehension, but we have need of a power, a necessity behind everything; we know nothing positive about it, but it exists for us in virtue of our need of it, and this need again exists as a part of the cause to which we belong. We are equipped with it; if it did not exist we should not have it. Do you think these conclusions are unreasonable?"

"I don't understand these things; I don't know."

"I don't know anything either; nobody knows anything. But

we have one light which is never extinguished. Otherwise all would be dark."

"What light is that?"

"It is *human thought.* It goes astray and it makes mistakes, but we can be sure that it exists. And it is part of our equipment, it comes from the godhead."

Silence. Both men sat reflecting.

The Consul asked: "Godhead—what godhead? If our human thought was worth anything it ought to be able to find the right godhead some day."

"It has been found. In our need of it."

"But then men are always throwing over one godhead and taking up another. The Greeks changed theirs, the Egyptians changed, we Scandinavians have changed ours. Nowadays we call our fishing smacks after the old gods."

"Pardon me," said the Postmaster; "you are talking about gods, but I spoke of the godhead. You are talking of theology."

Silence again.

Now this was rather a tiresome entertainment and the Consul would no doubt have been glad to get away, but for the moment he had nowhere to go, home least of all. And then there was this extraordinary thing about the Postmaster that every day, year after year, he went about being contented. Who else was contented? Old and young, small and great—they all had something on their minds, some burden to bear, with the sole exception, perhaps, of an academic failure and small-town postmaster. Was he a stupid man, a softy? Perhaps. But one could not dismiss him as such, oh no. For instance, he was far from being always humble and compliant; the Consul had heard him defend himself with assurance. He wanted peace, but if people would not let him have it he took it for himself. Oh no, you couldn't trample on him. The annoying thing about him was his philosophical reflections, other people had to suffer from them everlastingly, and to those who understood them they were a terror.

And why didn't he keep his mouth shut? No doubt because he thought he had something to talk about. But he was a solitary voice in his own town. It was so quiet in his home, his wife had not much to say, she answered when a question was asked her and attended to her household duties; so that all kinds of ruminations were dammed up in the Postmaster's brain, he muttered and talked to himself, but that did not always suffice, now and then some innocent citizen had to suffer for it and listen to a dissertation that was far removed from timber prices and steamer freights.

If Consul Johnsen had felt in his usual business-like mood and had not been worried at the moment and in search of an extraneous peace, he would have gone quick enough. As it was he sat on. He let it appear that he really hadn't the time but simply stayed out of politeness to a pleasant man; he looked at his watch, he suddenly opened his bag to see whether a letter had possibly been forgotten. Then he said in a careless tone: "Ah, human thought—how it seeks and seeks and never finds! It can't be anything very great, can it, Postmaster? Or what do you think?"

"It is the only thing we are sure of, you see. The light which burns continually and is only extinguished with the life of the world. In reality it is important enough for us. What the effect of this light is, how much darkness it dispels, is another question: if we whirl round and round in endless circles of error, perhaps this itself is movement, is life; a smooth, straightforward course would be without friction and must paralyse movement. If there were any use in it, we ought to kneel before human thought, before the light; nay, if we were religious, if we were charitable to ourselves, we should reverence human thought. But we are too intelligent, we do not bow our heads. We learn so much earthly mechanics. How we seek and seek and never find, you say. There I don't agree with you. I can agree that we do not find, but that we seek—no. But why should we seek if we never find? Well, the

seeking itself is movement in pursuit of an object. But we do not seek much, there are few of us who seek; we go and learn instead, we train our intelligence. How barren it is, how poor! Look at these intelligent people, they have only learnt their own subject, they know that; their schooling does that for them, their studies, the art of memory."

The Consul smiled: "I for my part am absolutely unlearned. That is to say, I have had other things to learn and even in those I am not accomplished."

"No? Are we not efficient enough, clever enough in a worldly sense? Of course we are. The human race is not backward in that way. During all historical time we have applied ourselves to such things and carried them to dangerous lengths; but we have neglected to bow our heads. Now we have reached an impasse, that's what has happened; and our escape will not be brought about by more knowledge and external proficiency, but by introspection, by reflection."

"But we can't all be philosophers?"

"No more than we ought all to be men of one-sided mechanical learning. But that is just what everyone is striving at. That has become the lofty aim. In recent centuries nothing has been so highly esteemed as the culture of scholarship; the upper class has infected the lower with this esteem till it has become the desire of every man to have a share in it. What an importance is attached to mechanical reading and writing all the world over! It is a disgrace not to acquire them, a blessing to possess them. No great founder of religion practised these arts, but nowadays they are indispensable alike to the child and to the aged. Nobody applies himself to bowing his head in reflection; they all read and write themselves into the equipment of ideas necessary to the modern man. It is more genteel to read and write than to do anything with one's hands! said the upper class. The lower class listened. My son shall not till the soil like any clodhopper, he shall live by others' labour! said the upper class. And the lower

class listened. Then one day the roar began, the roar of the masses; the masses themselves had now learnt enough of the arts of the upper class, they could read and write: Come on with the good things of this world, they're ours; devil a bit of work, we'll do for the next—the upper class spares itself that trouble!"

"Do you think it would be better if the art of reading and writing were the property of a few?"

"That idea is not a new one. But the best of all would be if we could eradicate men's esteem for all this exteriority, if all classes could lose their faith, their superstitious faith in mechanical scholarship. We hear it asserted that the roar would cease if the scholarship were increased, and so they go ahead with more and more arts and more and more proficiency in them. And heads shoot up emptier and emptier and are never bowed down in weighty reflection. No, that is not the way that leads forward; even in a worldly sense it comes up against the solid rock. I used now and then to read over my children's school books when they were small—I must confess I knew no more than an inconsiderable part of all these arts. Just go on giving them more, don't stint them, let them be glutted with them, that's the way. But the roar will continue and the roar will swell louder. A bowl of cream? Several bowls of cream, lots of them, they are ours! The life to come? Why, we read that the life to come is only a dream of pious old women, it's nothing to do with us!—Oh, how little charity they have for themselves!" said the Postmaster, shaking his head. "They have this little scrap of garden with its flower, but perhaps they will come back to their next earthly life in entirely altered conditions, but with their mentality unchanged."

At this juncture the Consul tried to look even more uninterested and succeeded very well; he cast his eyes at the drawings on the wall, was suddenly attracted by one in particular, got up, put on his glasses and examined a handsome gateway. For of course Consul Johnsen desired that respect be paid also to

his—to Johnsen's—judgment; he could not allow himself to be converted in an instant to several lives upon earth—though the doctrine was deuced palatable. He might come back again and carry on his old game, vanquish the enemies who worried him, give parties, have fun with the girls, manage steamships, make money, be a financial magnate in a small way several times more, he asked nothing better. Then he remembered that annoying sequel to the Postmaster's cogitation, that one might return in totally different worldly conditions, and Consul Johnsen was once more at a loss and knew not where to turn. Come back as a sailor, as a tramp; come back as nothing at all after having been so much! He resumed his seat and hastened to make an excuse for his lack of attention: "It was that splendid gateway, a gateway fit for Paradise! What was I going to say? —We don't seek, you said? But many people think they have found it. Some people consider it probable that when a man dies there is nothing left of him."

The Postmaster was as keen as ever, as ready as ever: "Except his last scream, his scream at the darkness facing him. For what have we been on earth in that case? For the sake of purposeless movement? Why?"

But the Consul, fearing another long discourse on this doctrine which did not appeal to him either, hastened to say: "The Christians believe in eternal felicity after death."

"Quite so," replied the Postmaster. "In itself eternal felicity is not a bad idea, it has comforted many an inhabitant of earth at night. But even this felicity is not to be attained unless one has deserved it, isn't that so? In fact, it is said that only a few shall attain it; then what is to become of the others? Christianity does not exempt anyone from working upon himself; on the contrary, it is severe in its demands: gratis and unearned shall no one attain felicity, it says. That is the requirement of the Law. That of the Gospel is in its way even harder: one must believe in it blindly, believe in it senselessly. I am so glad each

Christmas Eve, for then was Jesus born!' Not everybody can sing that. But everybody can work upon himself within his own capacity. There is nothing unreasonable in that."

Then said the Consul: "I was just thinking that according to your view I must have acted foolishly in assisting a boy to scholarship."

"That depends," replied the Postmaster. "Perhaps the boy was not so well endowed this time that he was capable of rising to a higher level. We do not know that. But we may assume that your intervention has not made it easier for him to bow his head. You cannot think so yourself either? For your intention was precisely to take this child of the masses and raise his head in the air. Now he's sitting on his form getting himself educated till he is fully trained; then he will arise, brilliantly vacant in an ethical sense, and go out into the world to teach others the same vacancy. Who in the name of goodness can educate us in what is here involved? We ourselves; nobody else. What others can teach us is mechanics of no value except for worldly efficiency. This is just what we see in the masses: they have now about as much mechanical learning as the upper classes themselves possessed in old days—very well, but their spiritual life has stood still. Their roaring? As if that expressed anything but personal worldly greed! The masses do nothing for the inward welfare of others, they have not been able to cultivate in themselves any ethical sympathy. They make a pretence of social instinct and do not possess even that. They want to roar and turn things upside down, and when it comes to a pinch even their own leaders can't hold them in. The whole thing's crashing, let it crash!"

Consul Johnsen nodded. This was more in his line, it was no longer ethics and lofty nonsense, the last words were conservative politics, business—that Postmaster was not so mad. The Consul said by way of apology: "The boy was so strongly recommended to me by the Headmaster and others."

"Very well," replied the Postmaster, "take the boy and put him to school, each one higher than the last, and make him perfect in outward accomplishments. He will come back to the joy of his own people and will exercise them yet further in spiritual emaciation. On the other hand, he won't smother the roar in them, not a bit, and he'll remove them yet further from all introspection. But perhaps it was just this and nothing else that he was fitted for, nobody knows. In a series of earlier lives upon earth he may have so conducted himself that he was incapable of rising higher in this one. So the first cause will have to wait for him and his until a change has taken place; the patient first cause which has plenty of time, plenty of eternity."

So it was breaking out again and the Consul would have to put a stop to it. What had he come for after all? On account of a casual anxiety, not about the next life, but about this. A little more politics would have captivated him; he was a great pillar of society whom envy sought to overthrow, whom upstarts mimicked, on whom the sailors of the *Fia* had once more brought annoyance and exertion—what remedy was he to use for this? Work on himself! The Postmaster was an ass.

"Well well," said the Consul, getting up; "it is all so hidden from us, both as regards this life and the next, especially the next. If we knew anything for certain about the hereafter we should no doubt behave accordingly more than we do."

"It is pardonable," replied the Postmaster with a smile, "if we entertain some worldly curiosity on this score. But doubtless providence has a reason for concealing from us what concerns our previous existence. This existence might be so black with misdeeds that the memory of it would overwhelm and crush us. That may well be. In that case we have a stimulant in the uncertain hope that we did not behave so badly."

"But, that being so, was it necessary to endow us with so much frailty from the very beginning?"

"If we assume that life consists in movement for the sake

of an object, then it is illogical to suppose that we were sent out from the beginning without hope. This could not be so. But we may well have been—as you say—endowed with frailty in order, so to speak, to start slowly in a long race. But that we should still be as full of frailty as we are today may be due to ourselves, to our neglecting our chances—"

"Yes yes yes!" interrupted the Consul. "What I mean is that it would urge us on to improvement in this life if we knew for certain what awaited us in the next."

"If only it would not make us worse, Consul, and things are bad enough as they are! Do you believe that man would lay up a reserve of good if he had certain knowledge that it was not strictly demanded of him and above all that there was no hurry? He would be more likely to go on the spree, to sin on credit, sin to the uttermost farthing and put himself back by many existences. It would be even harder than at present to work one's way upward, even easier to let oneself sink. In his next life a man might be down on bedrock; all would be lost, no garden, no flower, but movement would still be there—"

When Consul Johnsen went back to his office it was to save himself from being talked round. Theology! the Postmaster snorted contemptuously—but his doctrine was theology right enough! The Consul was annoyed with the whole visit; he was no Nicodemus who sought the Teacher at night; he had gone out for a little diversion, not to be converted. The only solid fact he brought back was the information that the Doctor had been writing to Scheldrup at Havre. What about? Gossip and spitefulness probably, intrigues, a five-crown midwifery visit at the Shipyard—deuce take the Doctor!

The Consul did not forget to give his head man Berntsen orders to send four dozen bottles of Madeira up to the Druggist's. And with a sudden jump his mind reverted to the Postmaster—God help me, what that man's wife must have to go through! What if he were to send up another four dozen of

Madeira to the Postmaster's as a present? But it would certainly be returned by the messenger.

Without doubt the wine would be returned by the messenger, and the Consul could not help smiling at such fabulously frugal people. Work on oneself—how? Did we ever see anyone receive the thanks of providence for that? We have a Blacksmith Carlsen in this town, a man of God, he labours in silence, does no one any harm, never makes one sick with jabbering about many lives on earth—he is chastened with adversity, with domestic troubles, his children turn out badly, one of his boys is said to be a hooligan; is there justice in this? Blacksmith Carlsen has a brother, Policeman Carlsen, an old rogue, a fox, with a well-to-do wife who has a piano, with a son in the Ecclesiastical Department, a daughter in the missionary society—all this perhaps because Policeman Carlsen has *not* worked on himself?

Let us work *for* ourselves!

XIV

HENRIKSEN of the Shipyard trusted in God that his wife would get over it this time again, though she was very ill. It turned out a vain hope. A message reached him just before the dinner-hour, as he stood among his workmen driving a rivet; he did not finish it but threw down the hammer and cried as he ran: "Is she much worse?"—"Ay, she's lying still now."

She lay still now. That morning the Doctor had gone away with great hopes; in the course of the forenoon the clergyman was sent for; he came too late.

Such was to be the end.

Now it was a question of the funeral, of entertaining the mourners, of flowers, black clothes, flag at half-mast; Henriksen got help from Jörgen Fisherman's Lydia and from Oliver's Petra, but all the same he had to have recourse to strong drinks to get through it all. He wept a great deal, too, and was in despair at nights. It made it all the harder for Henriksen that his wife had not chosen to send for him all that terrible forenoon when she lay dying; she had wished to spare him, she was always so good. "But send for the clergyman!" she had whispered. And he had not arrived in time.

There she lay, brought down in the midst of her career, in the midst of her youth and health, a little over thirty. It was too sad, and though the Henriksens were only ordinary people who had worked their way up, all the town worthies were ready to follow her to the grave. They were indeed. Fru Consul Johnsen made some slight protest: "We didn't go to Trader Davidsen's when he was made Consul," she said.—"No, but he was not being buried," replied Johnsen.—"These Henriksens," she

said, "we don't visit them; so why should we follow them to the grave?"—"To prevent gossip," replied Johnsen.—The lady gave in, but she made a great point of her kindness in doing so. Poor Fru Consul Johnsen, she never stirred out more than she could help and in the last few years she had put on more and more weight; on the whole she was not built for bodily exercise, no, she was not. The Consul, on the other hand, wore well, with his reasonable stomach and his hair slowly turning grey and falling off; he attended the funeral in a silk hat, throwing out his chest.

It was in a way some consolation to Henriksen, this great crowd of mourners; he beamed perhaps more than he should have done in bowing to the Johnsens, to the Doctor and his wife, to everybody, in fact, and he had trained his little girls to curtsy their thanks. The workmen from the Shipyard carried the coffin, and after it came the whole town; all flags were at half-mast, the church bells tolled. Even Olaus the grazier was at the funeral, and he told everybody why: To be sure it was at that cursed Shipyard he had got his hand torn off, but Fru Henriksen had always been a good sort in every way, a devilish good sort, all honour to her memory! You haven't a screw of tobacco, have you?

And there by the pump stood a group of women with their hands under their aprons, watching the procession and discussing in undertones all this profusion of flowers and solemnity. God help me, there goes Olaus the grazier among them, there's no shame in him. He knew well enough what he was about, it was the drink and the bit of bread he was after, his blue nose had scented it a long way off. Oh yes, Henriksen would do the thing properly, he was no skinflint, his workmen had the day off and all the townspeople who chose could come to the long tables that had been set up in his garden.

Oliver limped along with the rest. He didn't drink and had no need of a bit of cake; all the dainties he cared for he could buy

for himself. But Oliver was there because all the better-class people of the town were there. And anyhow there was no business at the warehouse this morning, everybody had vanished; Oliver brushed his clothes, took a good look at himself in the glass, locked the door and went off.

A funeral with four consuls and a whole town was no ordinary sight, and even a Swedish brig that lay discharging flour for Chandler Olsen was moved to half-mast her flag.

She might well do that, the lumpers had knocked off, discharging was suspended, the quay was deserted. It happened that the same brig had a sick man aboard, the Doctor had been sent for, but the Doctor couldn't come till after the funeral, then he wouldn't lose a moment.

But now the Doctor saw from the churchyard that the brig had her flag at half-mast, and an idea struck him: perhaps the sick hand was dead. He had been so unlucky with Fru Henriksen that now he was scared; as soon therefore as decency permitted he whispered an excuse to Henriksen and left the band of mourners.

He made a bee-line for Chandler Olsen's quay and went aboard the brig. There was no sign of life here, but at last he found a man lying in the crew's quarters and went up to him. "I'm the Doctor," he said; "may I feel your pulse?"

The Swede put out his hand.

"Let me see your tongue."

The Swede gaped.

"Are you taking food?"

Oh yes, he did that.

"Sleeping?"

Oh yes.

The Doctor listened to his chest, tapped it, got the man to turn over and tapped his back too: "You're sweating a good deal. How are your bowels?"

Well there, you see, they weren't quite right exactly, he'd had some trouble yesterday and today, but he was getting better now.

"Ah, you mustn't neglect them," said the Doctor.

"What say?"

"You mustn't be careless about it. I'll write something out for you and you can get it fetched from the druggist's."

"What for?" asked the man in surprise.

"What for?" repeated the Doctor, looking at him idiotically.

Oh, that devil of a Swede, that merry wag, was he having a game with the Doctor? The man proceeded to explain in a few words that it was not he who was sick, but one of his shipmates.

What? Then where was the sick man?

Well, you see, he wasn't really sick either, he cut himself on a bottle a while ago and bled a lot, but as the Doctor didn't come at once they managed to bind him up themselves.

It was clear that the Doctor was beginning to take offence. He said sharply: "Then where is the sick man, I ask, the one who cut himself?"

He had gone up to the Doctor's surgery, he must be sitting there waiting.

Before the Doctor left the forecastle he could not resist asking with suppressed fury: "But why the hell did you let me examine you, may I ask?"

But here again the man was ready with the most plausible answer; he mentioned the word quarantine, he thought the examination had to do with the general state of health on board, nothing else.

Well, then perhaps he was not an artful joker after all, but a decent man. Now if the Doctor had burst into a laugh and said a jovial word or two he would have taken the sting out of his blunder; but he did a worse thing, he showed his annoyance, he growled and was bitter, and so the incident acquired significance. The Swede began to answer back, which was not to be wondered

at; he also laughed very disrespectfully and all at once he got up from his bunk. Then the Doctor left.

Naturally the story leaked out into the town, into the little town, and the Doctor did not escape a few spiteful additions to a yarn which was ridiculous enough without them. All those who longed to see him snubbed had a glorious time, and Consul Johnsen, for one, laughed heartily for the first time in several days.

"He's such a fellow, that Doctor," said the Consul to Lawyer Fredriksen. "He's not the man who'd need to cross-question a patient about how he feels, the Doctor can guess that himself, ha, with just one glance! He's a fool. So I hear he discovered that the Swede had puerperal fever too?"

"Well, goodness knows if it wasn't something like that!"

"Ha ha, that's splendid! Come in, Lawyer, and let's drink a glass to a good election."

The gentlemen went in.

By a good election each of them probably meant something different, but Consul Johnsen was no fanatic and strictly speaking no politician either. He was only a pillar of society. A fanatic and politician, he? Why, a few years ago he might have been elected to the Storthing with the greatest ease; but he declined, he hadn't time, and besides, he was already Double Consul and a great man. Later on the wind began to change; this year he would hardly have got votes enough even if he had wished it, so industriously had Lawyer Fredriksen worked the division. And it was a matter of such indifference who was elected, it meant no change to C. A. Johnsen, Double Consul. This Fredriksen was very far from being one of his set, but let him be elected, by all means. And in that case it was not absolutely untactful to offer him a glass of wine in private, an upstart like him might take it into his head to make capital out of that foolish business on board the *Fia*. By all means, let him do that too, the Double Consul would still be the man he was; well, why not—let me offer you a glass of wine, Lawyer. You're a rare visitor to my house!

Oh, but assuredly Lawyer Fredriksen had no wish to be a rare visitor to that house, indeed he had not. Had he not cherished for the last year or two the juvenile idea of being permitted to come and go as a member of this household, nay, as one of the family? He had kept it well concealed from all the world and it would not be disclosed so long as he was still a nobody, merely a lawyer in a coast town; but the elections—maybe the elections would decide him to speak out. It depended.

"Fröken Fia brought back some visitors with her, I saw?"

"To be sure she did!" replied the Consul indulgently. "Painters again, fellow artists, two of them. If we had not been so well off for food and accommodation we should have been in a hole, ha ha."

"They were young lads; are they any good?"

"I don't know. Oh yes, I expect so. Much talked about and written about. And they make things pretty lively."

"Oh?"

"Their art's all over the house, one of them's painting my wife and the other me, we're stuck on stalks for them. The worst of it is, my wife has to wear her finery all the time, she's so keen that she has sittings both mornings and afternoons; so she lives in a low silk dress just now. Don't ever get married, Lawyer!"

"You don't mean that?"

"It will bring you wife and children, nothing but expense, ha ha."

Now this was a jaunty tone and the Lawyer did not like it. It was an impertinence to suggest that he ought to stay unmarried from now on; why so? Nothing but expense? Fredriksen must have thought to himself that the Consul for one had by no means lost by his marriage: it was Fru Johnsen who had brought the handsome dowry and given her husband a start. What else did he take Johanna Holm for? She was no beauty and no shining light. Oh no, Mr. Double Consul, you would have been a petty tradesman and a Johnsen of the Wharfside today but for your wife, re-

member that! But that was precisely what this Consul did not care to remember; the Doctor in his customary provoking way had reminded him of it once and the enmity between the two men dated from that occasion. Fru Johnsen, on the other hand, never forgot it, though she by no means rubbed it in or worried him with it. Once or twice in earlier days, when she caught her husband at incautious dalliance with the maids and wanted a separation, she had demanded the return of all her property; but as the business could not get on without her support her husband had to learn more caution, there was no other way.

The Lawyer therefore might have returned a disingenuous answer and perhaps made the Consul more tractable, but he hadn't the courage, nor was it necessary if he could gain his point by friendly means. He therefore quoted: "Marry and you will regret it! But I suppose it's like death: we must all go the same way."

"You too, Lawyer? Ah well, it's not yet too late of course. Your health."

The Lawyer drank in silence. Too late? At any rate he was a good deal younger than the Consul, who still exerted himself to make conquests all over the place. Perhaps the Consul did not realize that he was in the presence of a man who might be elected to the Storthing, his tone was a trifle too lofty. "Should the case occur I do not intend to wait till it is too late," he said. "We ought to all keep within our age!"—That was one for the Consul.

Away went the Lawyer. Well, let him go, he was welcome to that too. So he was to be Storthings-man, member of the herd, one of the country's parents and guardians? No, for his part the Consul would rather be what he was! He had recovered his good humour and his alacrity, had sent off his reports to the foreign Governments, had planned his attitude in the seamen's affair, had decided to take a firm line with the Doctor, made himself angry instead of afraid, worked up something of a warlike spirit in himself—now he was ready, come what might!

Wasn't that a great thing?

And besides all this he was a most amiable host to his daughter's guests, he conversed with them and sat to them, supplied them with wine for their picnics and dainties from the store, was careful of their comfort and presented each with a yellow silk muffler when they roamed about the garden till late at night.

The Consul was well aware that if Fia bought home guests of this kind it was only in order to help them without having to buy their pictures herself. She was no inexpensive young lady. For he would have to keep these portraits of himself and his wife, and he could not even inquire the price, but must hand out a sum. Could he very well do anything else?

However, that did not matter, the Consul did not take that into account; on the contrary, he was rather proud of it. For the purpose of these young gentlemen's visit had got about in the town, and not only in his own little town, but in the capital itself; it was in the papers that the two young artists were staying with Consul Johnsen, the coast-town magnate, in order to paint portraits of the family.

"Have you gone and put me in the papers?" he said to them with jovial playfulness. "I won't have any scandal," he said. "And by the way, you're here on the quiet, remember that! If it gets about that you're painting my wife and me they'll only put up my taxes!"

Ho, what a way he had of talking to the youngsters and listening to the tale of their pranks with a superior smile. They were not up to any very serious mischief, they were nice lads as far as he could see, but he'd be hanged if he'd trust them too far, he he. And in fact they drove out to his country house and started ragging there; amongst other things they took it into their heads one night to paint the black grey. Whether from genuine fright or good acting, the stable lad completely lost his wits next morning and only recovered them when he was given a five-crown piece to wash the colour off the horse again.

But now Fia, had she thoughts of either of these young fellows,

was she so to speak in love with them? If so, it was in a very quiet, not to say prim way. She was friendly and companionable with them, but always with a certain reserve; she never forgot to be ladylike. The painters used to call her the Countess. She for her part had no objection to this nickname, it was reasonable enough, even did her honour; but did she not deserve it? Daughter of her father, daughter almost of a whole town, of its most respected house, an artist, a poetical lady, a talent—what had the others to show if it came to that! Alice Heiberg, a Consul's daughter like herself, but without any special gifts, merely brought up to housekeeping and domestic duties; Chandler Olsen's daughters, who might turn out capable girls perhaps, but were being spoilt by ridiculous parents who tried to make ladies of them. Who else was there? The two little Henriksens of the Shipyard were still so new, only children, and now they would never have a chance of coming to anything.

Fia was the Countess, tall and graceful, refined in her ways, perfectly correct. In the last year or two she had taken to big hats and rather bolder colours, but nothing loud, only what she could carry off. So when she walked along the street dressed up as a painter it was no wonder that another artist, the Postmaster, stood still at a window and rejoiced over her.

No, the Consul could not believe that Fia had any intentions; in that case he would have had to speak seriously to her as a father. These boys were not the sort for her; one of them was the son of a district magistrate and had thus been brought up in a cultured home; the other was the son of a house painter; both equally poor. He was the last person to despise any class of society, was Consul Johnsen, but then he had this only daughter, she was his beloved child and he would guard her as well as he could. A business man's son from an old-established house would suit him better.

It was therefore no dissatisfaction to the Consul when the young artists came to the dinner-table one day and announced

that they had both received commissions. "And that we may thank the Consul for," they added.

"Congratulations!" replied the Consul. "And what are you to do?"

"Paint portraits of Consul Olsen and his wife."

"Of the Chandler Olsens!" cried Fru Johnsen. "Well, I must say!"

At that all the others laughed and the Consul remarked gently: "A commission is a commission, you see that, don't you, Johanna?"

"Haven't Heiberg and Davidsen ordered their portraits too?" asked the lady. "That will be the next thing!"

And again they all laughed.

The Consul turned to the two artists and briefly explained: there were now so many consuls in the town and all the newer ones had to ape the oldest. You don't see the humour of it, Johanna! On the other hand it might be pretty irritating that here in this house they could hardly move a hand without the others doing exactly the same, keeping time with them. But it isn't worth taking such things seriously, Johanna!

His wife did not take them at all seriously, that was a misunderstanding. If anyone looked at the other consuls with a smile, it was she. Her exclamation was simply a shout of joy.

"And with regard to Davidsen," said the Consul, "he is quite another sort: without pretensions, without culture, but also without grotesqueness. He is a working man, he stands behind his counter and sells soft soap. I have taken a liking to Davidsen."

"He he," laughed Fru Johnsen, deep in thought. "I'm just wondering—now I've been painted in a silk gown, what is Fru Olsen to put on to make herself grander still?"

They talked of this for a while and discussed costumes, colours, a simple gold chain or jewels. In former days persons of quality were not afraid of magnificence in their portraits, lace, buckles, chains, precious stones; nowadays people sat in a frock-coat like

the Consul, and it might be an excellent picture of the frock-coat.

"Well—" said the Consul, raising his glass, "now I will wish that you gentlemen may be just as successful, just as inspired, with Consul Olsen and his wife as with us. We are both highly satisfied and deeply grateful!"

They drank to that.

Fia asked: "When do you start at the Olsens?"

The artists replied: "Any time, at once!" And they added that there were two young daughters in the family who were possibly to be painted as well.

"There we have it, they're going to go one better!" cried Fru Johnsen again. "And now I know what Fru Olsen is to wear: she'll be painted in two silk gowns!"

Another laugh, a laugh that filled the room. It was so seldom Fru Johnsen made a joke; there must have been a reason for it and nobody expected it of her. Consul Johnsen took occasion to remark that she was first-rate, that she was splendid!

But it seemed as though the lady could not stand praise, she spoilt it all by wondering what Fru Olsen would wear on her feet—two pairs of shoes?

Then they all had to laugh again—if only she would shut up! thought the painters.

It turned out a good and paying thing to stay at Consul Olsen's and paint, the two artists had never had such a time, with cakes and wine in the morning and coffee and cream buns in the afternoon. And then there were the "little girls," the two young daughters, so big and healthy and full of gaiety, fit to eat up. The house painter's son fell in love with both of them, but he did not get on at all, it was not so easy as all that to gain a footing at Consul Olsen's; now if it had been the magistrate's son! The girls were good enough, perhaps they gave themselves a few airs and spoke rather more genteelly than they had been taught, but they were deuced pretty girls and young too; there was no

fault to be found with them, unless it was that they had too much of everything, of flesh and bone even, with a weight of *cendré* hair and lips a trifle too full: their faults were of the nature of superfluities; moreover they waddled somewhat in their gait.

Fru Olsen must have been maligned; an amiable lady, kindhearted to the point of tears and emotion, motherly, with gentle eyes and a receding forehead. Her only care was for her daughters, that they should turn out ladylike and happy; and how she loved these daughters and let them do as they liked, grow up in futility and bad behaviour, showiness and inanity. It was certainly not Fru Olsen who had asked to be painted, she protested against it every day and wanted to put the daughters in her place, both in one picture, a double portrait. It devolved upon Consul Olsen every time to induce his wife to sit still— Do you hear, Henriette, now you've once got started! The double portrait will do later.

So the victim sat there in silk and watch-chain and a profusion of rings to oblige her husband.

He himself was of a breezier nature, rotund with provincial opulence, an upstart, a lucky speculator. It amused him to sit humming vaudeville songs and grimacing and then suddenly plunge into dignified silence and restrict his conversation to nods and shakes of the head. He let it appear that he had important business to think about. "Hush!" his wife would say; "leave Pa alone now, little girls." And Pa was good-natured and kind and very vain; he liked to see people keep quiet around him while he was thinking of important business.

"That's it!" said the painter. "Now we've just got the right expression, that's first-rate, the firm lips, the look of shrewdness. Stay like that," he said, as though he were taking a photograph.

And Consul Olsen in his vanity forced himself to consider a

big Argentine corn deal instead of humming and grimacing away the firmness of his lips.

The portrait looked like being a particularly good one, and the artist, the painter's son, asked permission to exhibit it in Christiania. By all means, go ahead! The Consul didn't like the idea of being on show, he really didn't, but if it would help the artist, all right! He was glad to oblige the young painter, the whole family showed themselves obliging, including the daughters; but they did not fall in love with him. His friend who was painting Fru Olsen seemed to have better chances in that quarter; oh, but he too was well sold one day. They must be a queer sort of ladies, but they were a tradesman's daughters and perhaps they preferred a life of trade; it seemed so from their talking so often of Scheldrup Johnsen. Strange taste, and perhaps the girls were not too intelligent. Or how was it? One day when the magistrate's son had started their portrait they simply cut the sitting altogether. They made the excuse that they had met Scheldrup Johnsen quite unexpectedly in the street and had stopped talking to him, he was only home on a flying visit.

As if that was any excuse! The painter felt that he had been imposed upon and insulted.

XV

YES, SCHELDRUP JOHNSEN had come home unexpectedly and was to leave again just as unexpectedly. He took with him his father's right-hand man, Berntsen, and went up to the Doctor's surgery, gave him a curt greeting and put the following question: "What do you mean by the letters you have sent me? I've come home to find that out."

The Doctor was rather taken aback; he said with a half smile: "Letters? Oh, those—!"

"One day you write that a fresh specimen of a brown-eyed child has made its appearance, a day or two later that the mother is dead."

"Yes."

"Yes. I want to know why you have informed me of these events."

"Can't we be alone?" asked the Doctor in a subdued tone.

"No; I want to have a witness against you," replied Scheldrup.

"The fact is that what I have to say is not suited for the ears of strangers."

"But I know what will suit yours!" said Scheldrup, advancing a step or two. The Doctor retreated, his lips quivered and he said: "No, wait a moment, I see that I've made a mistake, I beg you to excuse it. I did really, I made a mistake, between you and somebody else, I beg your pardon! Really I didn't mean any harm."

"Really I ought to give you a sound thrashing," said Scheldrup in a trembling voice. "You're a slanderer, you are—"

"Wait a moment, let me—"

"A four-letter man, a dirty old gossip. Yes. I ought to box your ears."

The Doctor had recovered a little: "Wait a moment; I put a mark of interrogation, you remember; as a matter of fact I wanted to ask you something in the interests of science, in the interests of my own science. Have you the letters here?"

"If I'd had them here I'd have forced you to chew and swallow them."

"No no no, let us talk it over, talk it over calmly, shan't we? I beg you to excuse me; it was in the interests of science, I thought myself entitled to do it, as we knew one another. Don't you remember that I asked the question, that I put a mark of interrogation? You see, the point has not been settled scientifically—"

Scheldrup was so mad that he simply stormed away and knew no moderation; he spoilt his performance and made it vulgar: "Rot about your science! You're a coward on top of it all, a funk-stick, you're trying to explain away your letters—I could spit on you."

The Doctor had recovered still more: "Don't be so wild, the whole thing isn't worth it, it isn't worth it at all. It isn't very wise either; I've offered you my excuses."

"What do you mean by not being wise?"

"If we were alone I would tell you. It's not wise, you may be sorry for it."

"A hell of a lot I care for your threats, understand that?" cried Scheldrup.

"I beg you to excuse me," repeated the Doctor.

But all this shouting in the usually quiet surgery had attracted attention in the house; it brought in the Doctor's wife and forced Scheldrup to bow mutely and depart with his companion.

So all the result of a journey from Havre was an apology, a couple of empty words! That evening Scheldrup had thoughts of paying another visit to the Doctor and actually spoke to Berntsen about it, but was advised to stop in time, the Doctor had had

enough, more than enough! Oh, that excellent righthand man of Consul Johnsen's, his advice was good, he knew what he was doing and his thoughts were in more than one quarter; nor was it altogether impossible that he had guessed the bearing of the Doctor's hints during the scene in the surgery. What was there to guess after all? Nothing, gossip; for his own sake and that of his whole family Scheldrup had better keep his mouth shut.

"No, let him be, you've scared him all he can stand," said Berntsen.

Scheldrup gave in. Very well, his anger had died down, he would accept the apology. Besides, a box on the ears was liable to be an awkward business, he himself had been given one several years ago which didn't do him any good, that scandalous slap Petra had given him; he couldn't allow a box on the ears to cling to his name for ever.

Early next morning Scheldrup took the boat again to return to Havre.

And then the Doctor once more got himself into a nice quandary.

For he too had gone down to the mail boat in the early morning like so many others, he had been through a good deal and wanted to fresh himself up—a deuce of a freshening up he got! Could he imagine that Scheldrup would go away again so soon? —his holidays generally lasted for weeks. There he came along the quay, accompanied by father, mother and sister, accompanied by two artist visitors. Should the Doctor bow? Bow first? Certainly; there were ladies with him. He was standing well away from them, but he did bow; and when he had done that he moved still farther away.

But suddenly Scheldrup's wrath seemed to take hold of him again; he went after him. He must have taken the Doctor's presence on this particular spot for a challenge, a piece of impertinence. And what now? He walked after him as though he would trample the Doctor under foot, but without looking at

him, oh, never a glance. Would he walk him down, walk him into the sea? There were only four paces between them.

Then it was that the excellent right-hand man Berntsen turned up between the two and said to Scheldrup: "Look here, you've forgotten this!" and he drew Scheldrup away with him and handed him something, God knows what, only some rubbish perhaps. But from now on Berntsen was very busy on the quay, he was all over the place and yet always at Scheldrup's side: "I've come to look after some goods," he said; "we're expecting some goods." And even when Scheldrup went up the gangway Berntsen followed him to look for some goods on board.

Scheldrup stood by the rail talking in low tones to his people on the quay below. And his people had not got over their immense surprise both at his coming and at his going away again at once. His father had got nothing out of him, and to his mother and sisters he had given but one reply: "Business!" But they were all at sea.

Suddenly as he stood by the rail he pointed to the Doctor on the quay and called to Berntsen: "I say, Berntsen," in a clear, loud voice, "I ought to have given that fellow a licking after all. He's had the audacity to show up!"

Silence. One solitary voice was heard on the quay: "What the hell—what's he mean?"—It was Olaus the grazier, he scented a row.

"And when you're back in Havre you might remember to send us some more calico the same as last," replied Berntsen without turning a hair; "calico in suitable patterns, say about fifty pieces."

"Yes."

"Won't you make a note of it?"

Scheldrup was forced to take out his notebook and write it down.

Then the boat cast off and Berntsen jumped ashore.

The Doctor reeled as if he had received a blow, his face was

vacant. This lasted a moment; then he straightened himself, threw out his chest and strolled away. Oh, it was not likely he would put up with this, with the young shopkeeper's insult on the public quay.

In one way and another the Doctor had had much to annoy him lately, but as he left the quay he looked as if he were determined to bear it. Olaus the grazier followed him with his eyes and expressed an opinion of his lofty airs.

At that moment the Olsen girls came running down, so pretty and young and out of breath. "Fancy! we've come too late," they said. "Was there anybody interesting on the boat today? What are you all down here for, why are you waving to the boat, Fia?"

Oh, they knew well enough, the Olsen girls must have heard it before they were up this morning and had jumped into their clothes in a hurry, but they were too late after all.

"It's Scheldrup going away again," replied Fia.

"Fancy—you don't say so! Already! My word!"

And more than that they scarcely liked to say; they retired with the two painters and went home to their sitting.

They passed the Doctor again as he stood talking to Lawyer Fredriksen. "Well," the Doctor called to them; "so you were too late to say good-bye?"—Ho, the Doctor was saved, he was in no danger now and he had recovered his patronizing air.

"Good-bye? Who to?" asked the Olsen girls as they walked past.

The Doctor followed them with a quizzical look and turned again to the Lawyer: "We were interrupted. Cannot you answer my question?"

"No, not on the spur of the moment."

"Can't you?" said the Doctor. "But surely it's a matter that concerns society."

"Oh yes. But at the same time it's a very private matter."

The Doctor smiled sarcastically: "I thought that as a man learned in the law and one who with the help of God and worthy

men may soon be a legislator, you would be able to suggest a remedy for a social evil."

"An increased birth-rate is not accounted a social evil nowadays, I may tell you."

"There we are again! That's the Postmaster's eulogy of offspring."

"No, I dissociate myself entirely from that!"

"*I* count it among the evils. But be that as it may, the present question is of a particular man filling the town with his brood of brown-eyed illegitimacy."

"Do you say that?"

"And know it."

"It is so difficult to prove such things."

"Fairly difficult, yes; especially when your witnesses die. But then it is that perhaps science can step into the breach. Competent science is an irrefutable witness."

"Do you say that too?"

Oh, this was a little too offhand of the Lawyer, he should not have stirred up the lion. The Doctor asked in astonishment: "Do you doubt science? Are you still at that point of view?"

The Lawyer, the popular speaker, thought to himself: that was cunningly put, he wants to make me out a reactionary. He had no choice but to bring some relief into the gravity of the conversation: "No, there you misunderstand me. Science, of course! But listen, Doctor: brown-eyed children are quite pretty children, aren't they? And if what you say is true, the father must be a man of experience and ability, a good progenitor therefore. Our liberal-minded age—"

"Are you trying to make a fool of me?" asked the Doctor. "Good morning, Herr Fredriksen!"

Oh, he could have screamed, he could have smashed something! Everything and everybody went against him! And what a lawyer! —hirsute and unshaven, oh, so democratic, and now he had stuck a feather in his hat like a tourist in the Alps. A pleasing youth!

All these annoyances were making the Doctor lose patience; ought he not to stand up and give them a lesson, give the mob a lesson? Naturally his position was still firmly enough established, but people were not exactly respectful to him now, not at all respectful. Had he not entertained so lofty a contempt for people in general he would sometimes have turned round and asked them what the devil they were smiling at when he passed.

And then last week Consul Johnsen had sent him in a long bill —Johnsen of the Wharfside, the papa shopkeeper. Yes, he should get his money, he should get his halfpence as soon as possible; all right, here you are!—one of these days. Ha ha, the Doctor couldn't help laughing; he'd send the money by post, he would, so that everybody might see it, wasn't that an idea! And from that day and hour there should be an end to his custom in that shop. Wasn't it the place where a certain respected citizen couldn't even get honest weight?

He had a sudden inspiration to have a little talk with Mattis the carpenter and hear something more about his famous purchase of meal. He consulted his watch—yes, now.

So distinguished a visitor Mattis the carpenter had never expected at his workshop and he invited the Doctor at once into the parlour. They seated themselves among chairs and rocking-chairs and what-nots and tables with thick plush covers. In the middle of the room the hanging-lamp came down almost to the table, the walls were hung with photographs of relations who had emigrated and a picture of the Storthing of 1884; the sprigs of foliage that crowned the stove were as dry as paper. There was no room to move in the crowded little room and the air was stuffy; the conversation did not come to anything either, Mattis seemed so changed from what he had been, so disinclined to talk.

The Doctor had a screen which wanted gluing together.

The carpenter would send his apprentice to fetch it.

"They left the door and window open the other day, then the wind came and blew it down and smashed it of course."

"Yes. That might easily happen."

"But it ought not to happen, it ought never to happen. There shouldn't have been a draught. It's those fools of maids. How do you get on, Mattis? perhaps your house is well looked after, but maids are maids."

Mattis came to life all at once, all fire and fury; he shook his head violently several times, which might mean anything you like, only not yes. "It was well looked after," he replied, "but now she's leaving."

"Is she leaving? Why?"

"I don't want to talk about it. They're all mad."

"What was her name again?"

"Maren Salt. Not so very old, fifty perhaps, but she's mad too. What times we live in! They're always panting at the nostrils like fillies."

"You'll be able to arrange it between you," said the Doctor.

"Arrange it? I'll see her damned first!" declared the enraged carpenter. "That's certain sure!" he added.

The Doctor would have liked to go. These domestic affairs of a working man's home did not interest his academic mind and he was offended at the carpenter's lack of restraint; they were not equals. But he had come with a purpose: "Look here, Mattis," he said; "I think you were given false weight once at that shop of Johnsen's of the Wharfside?"

"What?"

"I ask because something of the sort may have happened to others in the same quarter."

"No," replied Mattis curtly with a shake of the head.

"No, do you say?"

"It wasn't at the Consul's, it was at the warehouse."

"And so Johnsen didn't know about it, you think?"

"The Consul? How could he know about it? He's not at the warehouse."

"Were you really served with false weight in that concern?"

"It was that Oliver. No, it wasn't anybody but that Oliver. I don't understand why you're asking about it, if you'll excuse me."

"When will you fetch the screen?" asked the Doctor, getting up.

"At once. Immediately. And it'll be dry by tomorrow. It's a pleasure, I'm sure. If you please, this way, Doctor!"

Trouble for nothing. And now this man went back the way he had come, the town Doctor, a person of importance, an authority; there he went with a look of disappointment about a trifle, about nothing at all. Perhaps he too had once had youthful dreams, had imagined great things for himself, a life crowned with success; his skin was soft in those days, his blood red, he was in love, he could smile—where had it all gone now? Life—life had flung itself upon it and devoured it! He had been more and more absorbed by petty worries and petty interests, year by year he had grown more wrinkled and ill-natured; alone with his wife at every meal, in an empty house, without family, without children, alone with his learning and his own unsuccessful career, inquisitive, tale-bearing, and small. Perhaps he too had once had youthful dreams; that was long ago, now he was stripped, all he had left of old days was the student slang, the radicalism, free-thinking and flippancy, without a trace of the beauty and warmth of youth even in its faults. He had degenerated, his mind was not the same, oh, he was in a bad way, he was no longer anybody. And now he would have to save up and get Johnsen's bill paid; then he would get in touch with another tradesman and open an account there, perhaps with Davidsen, yes, Davidsen was the very man, he'd just been made a consul and positively needed better-class custom. A plan, a decision, worthy of a housekeeper in a strait!

He went home and found his wife out, went up to the bedroom and found the screen intact. Ah, so it had stood being blown down; what had he made such a fuss for? Here again a sad and bitter disappointment seized him, a fit of anger so intense that

he flung down the screen and trampled on it. Now let the carpenter's boy come! No, there wasn't a single satisfaction in his life, not a single ray of joy. In twenty years, in ten years, he would be dead, and the same moment he would be forgotten.

He went out again, the surgery could take care of itself. There of course was the wretched Postmaster coming towards him, mumbling to himself as usual; the Doctor could barely bring himself to touch his hat as he walked past.

And then he met Henriksen of the Shipyard—just think how small the town was and what little people they were in it, there was plenty of room between them in the same street, they could read each other's backs as they went. Never mind, he'd have to say how d'ye do to Henriksen, the widower would expect it of him, and in other circumstances the Doctor could have added it to his bill. To tell the truth it was this fee that he had counted on to cover most of his debt to Johnsen of the Wharfside; but now Fru Henriksen was dead, his patient was dead, it was infamous luck, a real blow.

"Are the others quite well, is the baby getting on?"

"Yes, thank God, he's very well, he's splendid."

The Doctor understood that Henriksen had this child to temper his sorrow; he was left a widower, that was so; but this capital little boy had been bequeathed him for his consolation. Henriksen was not completely struck down, was not crushed, and the Doctor even entertained hopes regarding his fee.

"I'll go home with you and look at the child," he said.

Henriksen was happy and grateful: "Ah, if you will, Doctor!"

"I'll do so, I'll steal this half-hour from the surgery and go along with you. And yourself, Henriksen, you're in the best of health?"

"Yes, thanks, Doctor. As far as I know."

"Of course. Sound as a bell. Didn't she say anything, your wife, before she died? Hadn't she anything intimate to confide to you? They usually have."

"No," replied Henriksen, shaking his head. "You mean, did she beg me to look after the children, look after the baby? No."

"When they are dying they feel drawn to ask forgiveness for one thing or another; they may have done something wrong in secret, made a *faux pas* or something of that sort. Dying people have often asked me to be the bearer of their requests."

"Oh no, certainly not. And besides, she had nothing to ask my forgiveness for, far from it. I wasn't present either, unfortunately."

"She asked for the clergyman, I was told?"

Without a shadow of suspicion Henriksen answered: "Yes, no doubt she wished to have the sacrament."

It was a big, bouncing boy, the makings of a fine fellow, he had grown too, though he was being brought up on the bottle; a squalling youngster with a temper of his own.

"But he has brown eyes," said the Doctor.

"Yes, isn't that curious!" replied Henriksen. "All those months she was wishing for brown eyes for this child, like the last. 'If only God will send it brown eyes, they're so sweetly pretty!' she said. And then her wish was fulfilled."

"Well, that was a good thing anyway!" said the Doctor with a crooked smile.

But Henriksen took it in good faith: "Yes, wasn't it? Oh, it was providential! A glass of wine, Doctor? A brandy and soda perhaps?"

They went into the parlour and seated themselves with a brandy and soda each, Henriksen was not long in taking a second. He talked of his wife, of his loneliness; it was not to be borne. It was not so bad in the daytime, when he had his work; but when night came—night—! He was extremely friendly and attentive to his honoured guest; after a while he even grew grateful for his help—yes, indeed, for all the help he had given.

"Unfortunately it was not in my power to help more effectually," replied the Doctor.

"Well now, I say straight out that you did what you could and you came to see her lots of times and wrote prescriptions. We all did what we could, we have that consolation, she wanted for nothing as far as we were concerned. But I suppose her time had come. Help yourself again, Doctor."

"I don't know. Well, as you say so."

Henriksen beamed. "It's an honour, a real honour to my house, my wife ought to have lived to see it! And now I'd like you to send me a bill, Doctor, a decent-sized bill. Yes, I would. Or if you'll let me know now, just the total, that's all I want."

"Oh, that can wait till another time."

"Everything that could be done was done, that's our consolation," muttered Henriksen, plunged in thought. "Yes, I will really—no time like the present—"

Henriksen was up and opened his bureau, came back with a bank-note, a fat red bank-note, and handed it to the Doctor: "This here, if you like! Is that about right, is it enough?"

The Doctor was nothing of a money-grabber, he was not avaricious, what he had earned he had spent and more, spent it on food and drink, on "enjoyment," he was human enough to be embarrassed by the big bank-note, it amounted to a present; he made reply: "That's too much, I can't take so much—half that!"

Henriksen shook his head, he was in a spacious and kind-hearted mood, he wanted to show himself worthy of the Doctor's thanks: "Take it, Doctor, it's from her and me. And then we won't say any more about it!"

"I shall come whenever you want me, Henriksen. To the little one. Day or night."

The Doctor walked home like a young man. What had happened? Why, he had thought himself defenceless and had suddenly acquired a weapon: "Here you are, Mr. Johnsen of the Wharfside; you've sent me a bill. I'd forgotten that trifle, but here's a note from the post office and a money order coming to you!"

Oh yes, he was happy, but it didn't amount to a conversion with him, to a crisis and a wave of gratitude. Life had not changed, his enemies were the same as before; an accident had enabled him to crow over them in an empty and stupid way and he was not going to miss the opportunity. He could walk into Johnsen's shop this minute and settle his debt with Berntsen, but he did not; no, he preferred to rub his hands over a suitably malicious letter in which he proposed to wrap up the money when he sent it.

Catch him missing the opportunity! Why, there's another of the brown-eyed brood, the town was crawling with them! He stopped the boy and questioned him: "Aren't you the one who comes to my house with fish?"

"Yes, I used to."

"Have you given up fishing?"

"Yes."

"What are you doing now?"

"I—I'm going to sea."

"But what are you doing now? You look so unwashed."

"I'm at the blacksmith's just now, but—"

"But you don't care about it? No, you go to sea, that's right! Let's see, what was your name?"

"Abel."

"Tell your father—your father at home, I mean—to come and see me at the surgery one day. I've something to talk to him about."

XVI

WELL, UNWASHED Abel had been all his days, but naturally it hadn't made him any whiter to work at the blacksmith's.

And wasn't it rather absurd for him of all people to stand in a smithy, to be tied to a mud floor, to blow the bellows and strike the iron at the orders of a dancing little hammerman? But Abel had to do something, it was a good while since he was confirmed and he had grown into a big, strong fellow. And so one day Blacksmith Carlsen called him into the forge: "Look here, can't you take this sledge and do a bit of work for me?"

Abel hammered away, it really amused him to stand here and put out his strength, to smite stars out of the red-hot iron. He hammered till dinner-time, then the Blacksmith took him in and gave him something to eat.

"You see, I've got this job to do in a hurry," said the Blacksmith; "can you help me this afternoon again?"

"I can do that all right," said Abel.

When supper-time came he got another meal and on leaving he was given a crown. "You've done your job well," said the Blacksmith; "I suppose you couldn't come again tomorrow?"

"Yes, I can," said Abel.

He decided it for himself. He always decided for himself—whether he had inherited this characteristic from his father, from Oliver, or had acquired it through being left to fend for himself all the time he was growing up.

He stayed a week with the Blacksmith.

"Where are you now?" asked his father.

"At the Blacksmith's. I get my board and a crown a day."

"That's you, Abel, that's you!" said his father, and there was a

dash of pride in the cripple's heart. "Are you going to stay with the Blacksmith for good?"

"For good? No. Only as long as he's got all this work."

But Blacksmith Carlsen was busy for weeks, for months; oh, there was such a lot to forge and repair and get done, and Abel had to stay on. Not that he bound himself to learn the trade and gave up the sea, but after all he was doing well at the Blacksmith's and earning enough for decent food and clothing; he wanted both.

The Blacksmith and the boy were on friendly terms, they would sometimes knock off work and smoke a pipe, the Blacksmith making the excuse that he felt poorly and couldn't go at it so hard. From one thing and another Abel had the impression that there was no great hurry about the work they had left; it was true that other jobs came in now and then, but not more than the master could have managed by himself. One evening Abel asked if he was to come again. The Blacksmith had never heard such a question; why, there'd never been a job wanted in such a hurry as the one they'd got the very next day!

The Blacksmith was a widower with grown-up and married children, he was brother to Policeman Carlsen. A steady worker who made enough for his daily wants, more than that he did not aspire to; and thus he had plied his little trade for a generation and a half. He had a widowed daughter to keep house for him. Now and again he would relate his experiences, mere trifles, everyday events, but as he had never left his forge or his town each little thing had an exaggerated importance to him. Why hadn't he extended his trade, with journeymen and apprentices? He had never worried about that, hadn't the means or the house or even the forge for it. And for another thing, his big flock of children prevented his launching out. "Just think," he said, "five girls, five of that sort alone! And two boys into the bargain!" And then they had another blacksmith out in the country, right on the road into town; he did all the farmers' work, ploughs and scythes and

shoeing horses. Carlsen was a town blacksmith and did little domestic jobs for the houses, and now and then—and for this he had to get Abel's help—bigger forgings for the shipping.

"Ah well, what is a man to aim at in this life!" said Carlsen. "I've always knocked out a living—with this here!" he added with a smile, pointing to his hammer. "More than that I don't want and more I'm not worth. In a certain number of years I shall die, just as my father died and as my children will die. And then I would have to leave it all behind, however much I had. Adolf, he's at sea, he's married in England and writes that he earns only just enough to keep his family, he can't spare anything to send home; I write back every time that I can just as well send him a bit if he's hard up. So he goes one voyage after another and in a certain number of years he'll die too. That's sure, young Abel, we shall all go the same way. You see, Adolf, he was the youngest, it's eighteen years since he first went to sea and he's not been home since. Eighteen years is a long time, it was before your day, and now I think of it, he bought his sea-chest of your father. He goes sailing on and on, till at last it's time to lay up. It's queer to think what a little chap he was when he used to sprawl about the forge; it doesn't seem long ago."

There was a break in the Blacksmith's voice; he got up and went across to the window, which was opaque with dirt. "Hm!" he cleared his throat and put on a glum look: "I suppose I ought to clean this window some day," he jested. "What do you think, Abel? It must be forty years since it saw daylight!"

Then he laughed and went back to his seat: "Well well, so it goes! And my eldest boy's knocking about the country at all kinds of jobs. He was built that way that he wouldn't stick to anything regular, he'd rather go about from place to place; that may be all right too, but I don't know. He's never at home, no, he's a queer chap, he's taken it into his head that he won't come home till he's made a lot of money and can build on to the house and give us a lift: the boy must have got his head turned in

foreign parts. Give us a lift—does he mean that we're to fly? Just let me talk to him an hour or so! But his sister meets him sometimes, the one that's here with me, she meets him sometimes, they're great chums, he plays the mouth organ to her. He was a dab at playing the mouth organ when he was a youngster, and now he's better still, they tell me. Isn't it strange to think of us all? —now his sister met him the other day and he was playing his mouth organ, but he'd grown such a beard that she hardly knew him and he had several grey hairs already. But no, he wouldn't come home till he was a man of money, we were not to see him! It's a regular craze he's got. And he used once to potter about here in the forge, he too, hammering and carrying iron bars and chattering to himself. It doesn't seem long ago, a few years. And whenever you came across him in the street he'd take the mouth organ out of his pocket and play it. And his mother, while she was alive, often gave him an extra helping at meals because he grew so fast, and when he got any new clothes he used to come and hold out his little hand and thank us. Hm!"

The Blacksmith jumped up and bustled about: "No, this won't do; have you gone off your head, Abel? He, he, we're a nice pair! Get to work at the bellows again!"

He joked and tried to make out he was as merry as could be, but he must have been anything but that—weary and old, easily moved, worn out. He had no strength; Abel, young as he was, could lift double the weight and keep going all day long. What helped the old man was his handiness, his practice, he had the knack; but often he would stare with his dull eyes at a heavy piece of work and flinch from it.

Oh no, he was not merry. Nor was he as happy as he might have been in his children, not in all of them. One of his daughters had been a good deal talked about in her time, the one who was married to Kasper and whose goings on forced her husband to give up the sea and take a job at the shipyard. Now both she and the gossip had quieted down, but years ago when her husband

was at sea, she left home and went to sea herself, gaily and rakishly to sea. Oh, she was a skittish filly. Everybody pitied her husband and perhaps her father even more, in those days.

And yet—it was very far from a disconsolate existence, that of Blacksmith Carlsen, he had enough for his needs and a little more, he was content with his lot. Every evening he thanked God for the day that was past, surprised that it had gone off so successfully, that nothing had gone wrong. How easily they might have had an accident! Afterwards he would chaff his daughter in his quiet little way: "My word yes, we two men have done a good day's work to-day, but what about you? I can't see that you've touched a thing, the chairs are just as sound as ever."

They laugh at that and his daughter replies: "Ah, but unfortunately I've smashed two plates today."

"Do you call that anything!" says her father. "In that time I could have smashed a dozen!"

Seeing them in such good humour Abel ventures to suggest once more that perhaps he may stay away tomorrow; is there really any need for him to come any more? But at that the old Blacksmith turns serious, he looks at the boy as if that was about the worst thing he had heard him say: why was he in such a hurry to leave in the middle of the very busiest time, and where did he want to do?

Abel wanted to go to sea.

To sea? So late in the summer as this, getting on for winter? The spring was the proper time. Couldn't he anyhow stay another month? For now they had all these big jobs on hand, picks and borers to sharpen for the Borough Surveyor, two locks to put right at Consul Heiberg's, a new steel spring for the perambulator at Henriksen's of the Shipyard, a new axle for the churn at Consul Johnsen's country house, and all sorts of holdfast clamps for the painter who was to paint the church. Enough work for many men for a long time to come.

Abel stayed.

Oh, but the sea, he was not likely to forget that! There was his chum Edevart, he was in South America when last heard of, had been at sea for two years already, and there was Abel still on dry land, working in a forge! No, thanks! Not but what it had its attractions, it made him fine and sooty, people could see what his job was, and it gave him a certain consideration among the youths of his age when he walked through the town with clanking iron rods over his shoulders, looking like a grown-up man. And didn't the little boys have to mind themselves and jump out of the way of his iron rods before they got spiked!

So it wasn't so bad at all. Another thing was that Abel got nourishing food at regular hours, he had proper sleep, was being trained in a better way of life. And wasn't it very pleasant and comfortable in this working man's home, where everything was in its place, the floor was clean and the fuchsia stood in the window, red as blood! On Sundays the Blacksmith put on his best clothes and went for a quiet walk about the town and the country round. He was not in the habit of going to church, but he was an honest and religious man, with a thousand sins of which he repented and a thousand blessings for which he gave joyful thanks to God. Everything was good beyond his deserts.

Abel met him one Sunday in the street, and "Come along for a bit!" said his master; "where are you going?"

Well, Abel wasn't going anywhere, he was only out for a walk; he was lonely. Little Lydia had quite outgrown him, good-bye and good luck to her, she could look after herself now, he didn't even turn his eyes in her direction! Edevart, her brother, had once been a good chum, but now he too seemed to have grown too big, he never wrote him a word and now he was in South America. But where was Abel to go on a Sunday? At any rate he couldn't sit at home in his new clothes, with his washed face and the bright new sheath-knife he had bought; his brother Frank was at his fine colleges and never at home, and Oliver, his father, had rowed out to the skerries as he invariably did when he had a

day off, he was still looking for adventures. No, Abel wasn't going anywhere. But he knew of a good place for adders outside the town and perhaps he was on his way there for a hunt. He hadn't outgrown that, he was a boy still.

Or had he been waiting about for the Blacksmith? If so it was to give certain people the chance of seeing him in respectable company. It would do him no harm if she happened to be sitting at the parlour window when he and his master went by. But she could do just as she pleased about that—what was her name now? Little Lydia?—at any rate he walked past as blacksmith's assistant and indispensable to Carlsen.

When they had passed Jorgen Fisherman's cottage the Blacksmith began to be aware that he was doing all the talking, that Abel didn't answer him. Probably the Blacksmith had not cast a lightning glance at a certain window and discovered something that threw his heart into disorder; he guessed he was too old a companion for Abel, smiled at it and said: "Well, thanks for coming so far, Abel; I'm going this way."

Abel made for the adders. They were to be found in a scree, plenty of them as a rule, they lay sleepily basking in the sun; Abel and other boys had been out to hunt them in the course of years. The sport had both danger and honour in it, in their school-days it even brought them fame.

As he drew near to the scree he heard shouts and cries of other boys who were there before him, so he did not go on. No, for of course these were only children, eight-year-olds, they were so stupid. Sensible people don't make a row when they're hunting adders, they hold their breath and walk as if on rose leaves.

What now? On the other side of the Heath he knew there was a good echo, and he went there to do a little shouting. He was a boy still.

This was quiet and out of the way, not a soul. He shouted; yes, the echo was there. But the fact was, he was occupied with far more important matters than trying echoes; he threw himself

down in the heather and rehearsed the passing of a certain window. Well, take it all in all, what had he gained by this manœuvre? The knife and its nickel sheath had been turned the right way and had made a bright show, but had she seen it? And besides, the figure behind the glass might easily have been one of her sisters and not herself. Nothing was certain.

He lay a long while going through the incident again and again and weighing all its possibilities; now his bosom was wrung by a sweet pang and he thrilled with rapture, now he was hopeless and flung himself defiantly into the air, exclaiming aloud: "Let her go and be hanged to her!"

"Hanged to her!" mimicked the echo.

He shouted: "All right, be hanged to her!"

"Be hanged to her!" answered the echo.

He shouted louder and more clearly, he spelt it for the echo and got it to say every word. This kept him busy for a while, but he could not go on for ever entertaining himself with this parrot in the mountain-side and he fell to meditating on the echo itself, this speaking without a mouth, this untuned sound, this ventriloquism of a blindfold being who might be sitting somewhere beyond the bounds of life. He had got into the way of investigating according to his lights both himself and the things he met with on his path; nobody had taught him this, nobody worked at his development, only himself. Oh, he spent many an enjoyable hour with himself, he did indeed. In his earlier days he would turn to his father and ask him the most astonishing questions, and Oliver was not the man to shirk a discussion of profound questions, for he had seen so much of the world. But latterly and especially since his unhappy passion for Little Lydia had taken such a hold of him Abel preferred to seek solitude and wrestle with these questions himself. Blacksmith Carlsen had also influenced him; the old man's wise simplicity and gentleness did him good and his gaiety cheered him up.

"Boom!" he cried, like a gun going off.

"Boom!" answered the echo.

An answer so sharp and resounding, it was like an invisible leap. It was marvellous, he thrashed out the problem thoroughly, ay, it fairly floored him, the devil could understand it. He was surrounded by riddles and mysteries; he had gone out with the idea of possibly coming across an adder, and sure enough he heard an echo, for instance. This topsyturvydom in itself was incomprehensible and mysterious, he could ponder over it till nightfall. How he could ponder! It was not a kind of appetite, or nigger sport, or making money, the deuce it was. And whatever it might be, Little Lydia anyhow couldn't do it; she might be sitting at home looking out of the window, but she just ought to know how stupid she was! He saw great plains with beasts grazing, saw towns, forests, seas, infinity, ages—

Had he been asleep?

He sat up and cleared his throat, yawned, flung out his arms and stretched himself. Instantly something dangled out of his sleeve, a dark bit of rope with an open mouth, a long beast that wriggled away like lightning into the heather. Ho—this isn't where we shriek and clutch at our skirts, we're on our feet in a second and after the fugitive, find him, plant a foot on him and crush his head. Done.

Oh, but who was there to see? The sky and the earth, nobody. The deed was wasted.

He lifted up the beast by the tail and carried it with him, he would make a present of it to an ant-hill on the way. It was a splendid fellow, with dark stripes and zigzag pattern, a real beauty, oh, how loathsome. He found no ant-hill and still dragged the dead reptile with him, nor did he meet anybody, not a child.

This was getting to be a bore, it was still a long way to town. All at once he felt a sting in his hand, in his right hand which held the snake, and when he looked at it the hand was dark and swollen, so he had been bitten after all. And here again we're not a girl who howls and bursts into tears; though there's nobody to

see, we behave like the man of iron we are: Abel dropped the dead snake, found the wound and set to work to suck it out. He knew that, he had done it before; at the same time he took off his braces and tied them round his wrist. Strange that he didn't feel the bite at the time; now he had had the poison in him several minutes and it was more and more difficult to get it out simply by sucking. When he went on he took the dead snake with him.

He now felt more and more stings in his hand, so at all events he was not having a monotonous Sunday. Now and again he looked at this hand which wouldn't get any whiter, at the wound, a ridiculous little prick which made no show at all. But as he walked on and the hand didn't get any better he looked at it impatiently once more, examined it properly, as though to make sure that it was a wound and that it was his wound. Yes, a mistake was out of the question. He now showed signs of greater interest in it, and the sight of a man some distance ahead was not unwelcome. He sucked and walked on.

He put his hand with the snake behind his back so as not to frighten this person; it was Blacksmith Carlsen sitting there. This is where he had come and here he sat in solitude on a stone with folded hands and a smoked out pipe. "Are you here again, Abel?" he said. "I'm just sitting here doing nothing; I'm looking at all the world of mountains and valleys and I can't help wondering, wondering. Look at that lump there, that peak, he he, a stout fellow he is, just look at all the rocks he's hung about himself! Oh, it's a grand world! Were you thinking of going home?"

"Home, yes," nodded Abel. But then there was this snake and he'd got a little bite—

The Blacksmith jumped up, old and flustered, trembling:

"No no no—"

"Oh, it's not dangerous!" declared Abel.

But how this sympathy did him good, one is not too old for that when one is still a boy; this terrified bewilderment in an

older person for one's own benefit is positively sweet, it gives one a glow and makes one laugh like a man and say Pooh! it can't possibly be anything, but Master must please tie this awfully tight round the wrist, a little higher up, there—

They went towards home. "I've never seen such a hardy fellow as you," said the Blacksmith; "and doesn't it hurt?"

"No, not a bit, only a little."

Abel went out of his way to find an ant-hill that he remembered from his vagabond days, and the Blacksmith shook his head, but followed him. And from the ant-hill he went home with him; the old man was in fact rather proud of the youngster, he exhibited him to one or two people they met and gave them a proper scare.

They entered the town and Jörgen Fisherman was standing at his door. "Now here's a boy with a hand for you to see!" said the Blacksmith all agog. Abel was bursting with renown, he would not stop at this door, least of all at this door, but smiled and passed on. The Blacksmith called after him to hurry: "Go on now! Straight to the Doctor! Quick!"

Truth to tell, Abel was in a cold sweat and sick as a dog, but raised above the earth with happiness. There, now Master was telling them his story; it might do certain folks good to hear how a man of iron behaves after a snake-bite.

"Wasn't it you I sent with a message to your father?" asked the Doctor. "Why doesn't he come?"

"I don't know."

"Tell him to come at once. Or else he'll be fetched. Tell him that! Now let's look at the hand. Ugh, what a sight!"

The Doctor knew his art, every summer he had adder bites to cure and never a fatality. "But this is a particularly virulent case," he said every time; it made the patient so proud, he was able to tell everybody that he'd been right in the jaws of death. But this time the Doctor said repeatedly that it was a very dangerous case.

XVII

NO, OLIVER was not the man to run when a doctor called him, he was of more importance than that. His situation as warehouseman put him on a level with better-class people, with Johnsen of the Wharfside's shop-people, even with right-hand man Berntsen. And perhaps Oliver was even a shade more distinguished, he didn't run upstairs and down for the customers, he was stationary. Just the situation that suited a man like Oliver.

He had found his right place, it was a fine thing to manage a warehouse, to have people saying good-morning to you, to earn enough for food and clothes, to have time to look in the glass and be smart. Side by side with this he was able to cultivate his personal interests; he rowed out to the skerries every Sunday and foraged about, full of dreams and longing, God knows for what, perhaps for a better life, a new Jerusalem; and he brought back from these trips whatever he had found: a piece of driftwood, a few illicit gull's eggs, or what was most precious and illicit of all, a bundle of eider-down. Never had he been caught at this, nobody would strip a cripple naked to search for a bag of eider-down about his person. And now in truth Oliver had collected a great mass of eider-down in the course of years; the question was how to get rid of it. But even if he never could turn it into money he would go on collecting it just the same; it was a class of goods he could not set eyes on without possessing himself of it.

Things were going better at home too, the years must have rendered his wife more tractable, she had taken more kindly to home life and coffee, and coffee he could get fairly cheap; he had less occasion than of old to steal after her with a fish knife up his sleeve. She continued to be insufferable many a time, she did, and she continued to puff out her flexible nostrils and sniff

the air; Petra never got what she wanted and never got enough, she was an unfortunate creature, born insatiable, born greedy of good things, in contrast to Oliver who contented himself with the second-best, contented himself even with her. There was no doubt that Petra was of the seed of Satan in her kind. Oh, but so long as she didn't play the giddy goat—and she never did that, she didn't carry things too far, strangers might stare as they liked and she had only once had a blue-eyed child. Taking it altogether Oliver had reason to be satisfied, he had her to come home to every day, he warmed himself at her, took his food by her side and lay in her bed, she puffed her breath on him as she slept. That was something, you see. And at all events she was his wife and nobody else's, so far as one knew!

Was she not pretty? Certainly she was, an agreeable figure, with a sweetness in her ways, something naturally luscious and filling —otherwise he'd never have taken her, mark that! But she wasn't attractive to every point of the compass; if only Mattis the carpenter had been well out of the way Oliver would have been easy in his mind. Every point of the compass, she? Petra, who could box the ears of Scheldrup Johnsen himself! As though she would give an invitation to the first comer and say: Come now, let us luxuriate and be vicious beyond measure! No, no, not a bit of it! Rather was she like an altar-piece, Lord bless you, on Sundays she could be seen with a gold cross that she had got as a bargain and wore on a ribbon round her neck. And nobody imagined anything so absurd as that she was to be had cheap. Not a bit.

In her way Petra was the right wife for him, for Oliver; many a time he didn't wish to change her. The blue-eyed child? Well yes, that little girl gave him something to think about; oh, for some months she kept up the flame of his suspicion; but so soft and effeminate had he grown that he could not hold out against the child for long, their daily life brought him too close to the little girl, when no one else was at home he had to rock her cradle. And his suspicions were cheated, so to speak; he had ex-

pected to see a horse's nose in the little face, but the girl grew up with a nose presentable beyond the ordinary. The devil could make it out. He had discussed the matter at the time with one or two people: that he had suddenly become the father of a blue-eyed child and all the other children had brown eyes; what was he to make of that? He received evasive answers, Jörgen Fisherman was not a bit surprised, stranger things than that were to be seen; moreover, Nature had many hidden secrets.

Oliver, then, was under the circumstances a fairly happy father. Such children would certainly come to something, there were not many who could boast of better, and by the time he was old and unfit for the warehouse work his children would be grown up and would help him in their turn. Of Abel perhaps he did not expect much, but Frank—oh, Frank was at fine colleges and would be a learned man and take a great position in time. He was already at the University and was studying all the time.

Finally one thing more: it was not amiss that Johnsen of the Wharfside was Double Consul, Oliver took some pride in that. There was a talk that Chandler Olsen was also going to engage a warehouseman just for the look of the thing, and that Martin of the Heath, the old fisherman, had an eye on the place. All right, let him take it, Chandler Olsen was a Consul too and a rich man, perhaps he was even a good man to be with. But was he twice a Consul? He he, Martin of the Heath, you'll see!

So the days and the years went by and Oliver, he lived as best he could and went on his way as though a wooden leg was nothing much. For eighteen years he had acted the human being as well as he could, as well as anybody, better than some.

One Saturday evening he was brushing his clothes and his shoe and getting ready to go home. He had shown an enigmatical caution lately, whatever may have been the reason, but he looked out into the street and on seeing the Doctor in the offing he drew back and waited. Why did he avoid the Doctor, to be stopped

in the street by whom would have been thought an honour by everyone else?

The Doctor was strolling up and down with the Postmaster, from whom he usually ran; he strolled up to Davidsen's shop and back again, time after time; Oliver was barred in. Was the Doctor actually lying in wait for the cripple? For he couldn't very well visit him personally in a warehouse? Oliver heard snatches of the Postmaster's conversation and didn't understand a word; the Doctor no doubt could understand it all, but he seemed not to be paying attention—no, it looked rather as if he was just using the Postmaster as a pretext for hanging about here. An unmannerly proceeding.

Now Oliver had had the remarkable experience of being twice sent for by the Doctor, and maybe he couldn't guess what it meant. Or how was it? He had acquired the curiosity and cunning of a woman: he wondered whether it hadn't some connection with Consul Johnsen. He had felt his way, had mentioned it in all humility to the Consul: that he was a poor unlearned man, the Doctor wanted to see him at his surgery, what was he to do about it?

The Consul put it aside at once with a laugh of surprise and said: "What do I know about it!" But then he thought for a moment and asked: "Has he sent for you?"

"Twice."

"Oh. What does he want with you?"

"I don't know."

"Don't take any notice of it!"

Whereupon Oliver had acted accordingly and taken no notice of it.

But here was the Doctor outside and he seemed to be herding him.

It can't have been any amusement to the Doctor, he only took part in the conversation now and then, especially when they met

someone he wanted to impress; then he gave the Postmaster a puzzle to answer. If Oliver had understood any of it he might have enjoyed the following dialogue:

"There was that about offspring. You didn't give me an answer to that."

"Perhaps I didn't make myself clear," said the Postmaster. "Is it not so that when the parents have seen their children grow up they no longer care so much for them, but for *their* children again, the grandchildren? This seems to point to a line implanted in human nature, the line of endless continuation."

"On the other hand—is it not rather careless of this implanted line to allow children to be born incessantly to the most miserable existence, to hunger and cold and bad bringing-up, to disgrace and ruin? Now if they were all born to a good home!"

"I don't know whether the question can be put in that way," replied the Postmaster. "It may be that we are born to the destiny we have deserved in previous existence. And there are some things that point to this: some children may be brought up in the best homes and turn out badly; others may be born in misery and turn out excellent men and women, they do their own bringing-up. I'm sure such cases are not wanting here in this town. Life is a mixture, it is nothing but a confused mass of such cases, and I don't think our logic is capable of explaining them."

"Why yes, let us use logic, otherwise we shall be talking nonsense—excuse me. You said just now that children from the best homes might turn out badly. Quite so. But at the same time they have deserved their fate in previous existences. Had they then deserved to be born in good homes?"

"Why not? It does not follow that a good home and worldly prosperity is the best lot, that a life free from pain is the best of lives. Look at the other side: some people can actually be supported and nourished by suffering, can find their happiness in suffering."

The Doctor could not restrain a groan, it was hard to go on

being polite dead against his own convictions. He looked at his watch, turned sharp round and made for Davidsen's again at a furious pace, but the Postmaster stuck to him. When they came back they had changed the subject, the Postmaster was delivering a social harangue:

"Of course it's the working middle class that keeps life from becoming extinct, I don't understand how anyone can deny it. It is simply not the masses, though they are the ones who say 'We working men.' Oh, the masses have learnt the tricks, they can read their noisy rag, they've got the intelligence that demands. 'We working men.' Does that mean the farmer, the fisherman? We know very well, it means no one but the industrial worker. He's the one who roars. Do you remember, Doctor, you and I have seen the time when there were no industrial workers among us, but every cottage had its industry? In those days life was not so busy but that we had time to keep holiday, it was no poorer in food, no richer in sorrow, habits were simpler, contentment greater. Then machinery gained the mastery, mass production began, the industrial worker appeared—to the benefit and delight of whom? Of the manufacturer, of the employer of labour and no one else. He wanted to make more money, he and his house were to enjoy greater worldly luxury, he did not believe he was to die—"

"No, look here," smiled the Doctor, "didn't he find work for many people, didn't he provide bread for hungry mouths?"

"Bread? You mean money for bread. He set them to factory work—while the soil of the country lay untilled. That's what he did. He enticed the young men away from their natural place in life and exploited their strength for his own pecuniary profit. That's what he did. He established a fourth estate in a world that had too many estates already, a whole class of industrials, life's most unnecessary workers. And then we see what a human travesty such an industrial worker becomes when he has learnt the tricks of the class above him: he leaves his boat, leaves his

land, leaves his home, parents, brothers and sisters, leaves the beasts, the trees, the flowers, the sea, God's high heaven—and gets in exchange the Tivoli, the club-house, the tavern, bread and circuses. For these benefits he chooses the proletarian life. And then he roars: 'We working men.'"

"So you wouldn't have any industry at all?"

"Eh? Was there no industry before?"

"I mean no factory production?"

"What is one to answer? We could imagine a few exceptions."

"There we are!"

"For instance, manufacture of window-glass."

"Ha ha ha."

"In warm countries this is an unnecessary commodity, but in our climate we require it. That is what I meant."

"Dear me, yes," said the Doctor, "you needn't make excuses for the fact that we human beings require window-glass amongst other things."

The Postmaster was at times so helpless, so wanting in smartness, that he risked being caught. He happened to quote the saying: "The last shall be first." A young graduate, the magistrate's deputy, was just passing, and the Doctor asked maliciously, as if it puzzled him: "My goodness, then what are the first to be?" But the Postmaster answered in good faith: "The first shall be last."

"Ha ha ha," laughed the Doctor again. "That's the devil!" he said. "Tell me, Postmaster, how do you always manage to be so happy about everything?"

The Postmaster must have guessed by now that he was being chaffed; he replied: "Not always and not about everything," and then he said no more.

"It must be habit," said the Doctor. "You cannot dispense with happiness. The rest of us who are of this world have to get on without it. Of course it's habit."

The Postmaster remained silent. The Doctor had to have re-

course once more to the question of offspring in order to set him going. And now the Postmaster would not suffer himself to be trampled on, but unexpectedly called a halt: "Was it you, Doctor, who were talking about love? What do you understand by it? You ought to have said sexual instinct, animal functions, you ought to have said lechery—ah, but with every precaution, as childless as possible."

"What in the world!" exclaimed the Doctor, astonished. Then he regained his superiority and did not care to continue the discussion. He looked at his watch. All at once the Postmaster ceased to exist for him; he called into the warehouse: "Come out, Oliver, I have something to say to you."

As if Oliver came just at the call of a doctor. He sat in his hiding-place till the Doctor was gone, then locked the door and left.

All the same, he was not to escape this encounter; the Doctor was watching for him in the first side-street, he even put a finger to his hat and changed his whole tone: "Good evening, Oliver; it was lucky I met you, can you come along to the surgery a moment?"

Oliver went with him, whether yielding to his curiosity or because he wanted to put an end to it.

"Have you any objection to my examining your hip?" asked the Doctor.

"How do you mean?"

"It's in the interests of science. You're a good subject. Take off your clothes."

Oliver hesitated.

"It won't take long, five minutes is enough, two minutes. I want to look at your hip; do you never have pain in it?"

"No."

"Well, let me see."

No, Oliver wouldn't. It was Saturday night, he had to get home.

What rubbish was that?—two minutes.

Oliver refused. Oh no, so far but no farther. True enough, the Doctor might enjoy a great reputation in town, but that story of the Swedish sailor had done nothing to increase it, quite the reverse. However, Oliver would probably have complied and undressed himself, only he seemed afraid to do so; he must have have had a special reason for declining. What had come over him? He had put on his sly and malevolent expression, he turned his eyes slowly on the Doctor and said: "No, I'm not going to."

"You're an ass," said the Doctor. "You're losing your beard too, how can that be? You're getting fat and hairless like a woman."

"There's nothing wrong with me," said Oliver.

"That's just what I wanted to find out. You shan't lose by it, I want to clear up something, it'll only take one minute."

"No, I'm not going to."

The Doctor did not give up: "How was it you met with your accident?"

"I got up against a barrel of oil."

"I don't understand."

"It knocked me down and broke my leg. Then they cut it off."

"Let me see how high up it was amputated."

Oliver showed with his hand.

"No, take off your trousers, I mean."

"No," replied Oliver for the third time; "I'm not going to."

The Doctor said—and he put a dignified profundity into his words: "As you please. I only wished to help you."

Oliver made for home; it was getting late, he already heard the music from the dance hall, as it was Saturday evening. It occurred to him that perhaps he was not well enough dressed to pass the smart young men and girls who usually collected outside, so he preferred to go round. What a bit of luck—why, there was Petra, talking to no other than Mattis the carpenter. They were extremely intent on what they were saying, the carpenter

indeed looked grossly passionate, and once more Oliver was doomed to feel that gimlet through his heart, he began chewing as he walked. Then Mattis caught sight of him and withdrew, stepped into his workshop. And it was the wisest thing he could do, to withdraw, to disappear, for at that moment Oliver came towards him chewing hard. Petra too did wisely in waiting for her husband; had she thought for an instant of flying like a deer that husband would have called her back in a voice of thunder, he would.

They walked side by side, Oliver chewing and saying nothing.

Petra must have guessed that a storm was impending; she seized the offensive and murmured: "Hm. It's a nice state of things."

"Yes," replied Oliver, "It is a nice state of things." And with that he fixed his eyes upon her.

"With Mattis, I mean. I suppose you've heard?" she asked.

Heard what? He had heard nothing, was full of nothing but his own affairs and answered: "You're the one who's going to hear something."

"What are you muttering about?" she said, innocent and unconcerned. "Oh, then you haven't heard it?"

It must be something special, curiosity got the better of him, the gimlet in his heart was less painful, he asked: "What tale are you trying to put me off with?"

That was the exact moment Petra wanted to make herself precious, she was even a little hurt: "I'm sure I don't want to put you off with anything. I shall hold my tongue."

Oliver had to change his tone entirely and begin begging before Petra gave in. Oh, but the news was far too good for her not to be the first to tell it; Petra could keep it in no longer: "It's Maren," she said.

"What about her?"

"Maren Salt."

"Yes, I know."

"She's been brought to bed. She's had a baby."

Oliver didn't seem to know quite how he was to take this news, but at any rate he was done out of another good row with his wife. He replied with some vexation: "So that's the sort of thing you two were yarning about."

"Yarning? Why, he just came out of his door and told me that. He's quite off his head about it."

"Serves him right."

"Oh, you don't suppose it's Mattis that's the father?"

"And how do you know?"

They squabbled about that, fell out over it. If Mattis was not the father, then Oliver was still more uncertain how to take it. But anyhow it was Saturday night and late, Oliver was hungry and ungracious, he only thought of getting home. When at last he was given food and plenty of it, life appeared brighter, he laughed and cross-questioned Petra about Mattis, what he had said, how he had taken it.

Petra told her story. She was well pleased that the storm had passed off, she too regained her humour and went so far as to mimic Mattis and make fun of him: Mattis had insisted all along that Maren should leave the house before she was brought to bed, but Maren had put off and put off and filled him up with lies, saying her time was not coming for a long while yet. Then one night he hears a child crying in the house; up jumps Mattis and runs for the midwife, runs for the Doctor. The Doctor says sceptically: "Maren Salt, isn't she a woman of forty or fifty? It can't be possible?"—Mattis had replied: "Do you think it's me that's had the baby?"—"Are you sure there is a baby?" asks the Doctor.—"It's howling anyway, it's lying there. Come and see."

Petra laughed and Grandmamma laughed, even the two little girls could see the ridiculousness of Mattis the carpenter and could not keep serious. "You ought to have seen that Mattis," said Petra. "He jumped about and sniffed that nose of his; he was wild that he hadn't got the old woman turned out of doors in

time. 'They say she's between forty and fifty,' he cried, 'but she's sixty at least, and is that natural? Going and wagging her nostrils just like a rabbit's ears at her time of life!' "

Then Petra had been wily and said: "Well, the best thing you can do is to take her, Mattis."—"Take her?" he yelled. "I? What should I take her for? Hell to that! And if the day should come for me to change my condition you can bet your life it won't be with a rampant old trollop. That's certain sure."

The whole family laughed.

But as though to restore a certain amount of dignity Oliver collected himself and said: "But was all this a thing to be cackling about with a strange man in the middle of the street?"

Petra felt safe now: "No, I might have gone in with him, but I wouldn't do that," she replied.

"You should just have tried."

"Why not? He's so queer and simple, I don't believe there's anybody so queer as Mattis. I'm certain that if anybody was married to him she could have had child after child without his knowing it. He wouldn't have understood a thing about it."

"That would have suited you— Go to bed, children!" he shouted suddenly to the little girls and got rid of them. Even Grandmamma left the room. "Yes, that would have suited you," he repeated.

"Me?" replied Petra; "who's talking about me?"

"You seem to think you've got too short a cable, you can't swing far enough."

"I?" laughed Petra, and "he he he," she laughed. "No, I've got a man who can keep his eye on me. I know that all right."

Oliver looked at her suspiciously, to see if by chance she were making fun of him; he was prepared to be watchful and cross.

Petra turned him round her little finger: "But all the same," she said in a tone of flattery, "all the same you might be charitable and let me go where I like a little more. You might do that, Oliver. You know I don't do anything wrong, I only go around and look at the shop windows."

"It's not the sort of thing for a married woman who's supposed to belong to the better class. Where do you want to go, to the dance hall? I can quite believe that of you."

"And what if I did go to the dance hall? If I just looked in for a moment?"

"Yes, and took the little girls with you," retorted Oliver scornfully. "But as long as my name's Oliver Andersen and as long as I have the position I have it shall not be. Now you have my answer."

"No, no," replied Petra, giving in. "It's for you to say, and if you say No then No it must be."

"That's so," said Oliver, swelling.

"But I could go and see Maren Salt, couldn't I?"

Oliver flared up: "I'd be glad if you'd understand you can't go and see that sort of people, do you hear? you can't be seen in that house. Out of the question. For when a man's a Manager you can't go where you like either, you have to keep to your own class. I won't stand it, and you must just get it into your head that I won't have it."

"No, no," sighed Petra, letting him have the last word.

But in truth Oliver was flattered that his wife had asked him for a little free play, he was that. For it wasn't every wife who asked; a lot of them took their fling without saying a word about it.

XVIII

One event succeeds another: Fru Consul Johnsen was walking one day in the street with her daughter, contented with themselves and with all the world, when they saw in a side street the artist who had painted the lady's portrait, the magistrate's son. They saw him with one of Consul Olsen's daughters on his arm. Fru Johnsen was stout and heavy, she could have sunk down on the spot. Fia merely said: "Yes, they are engaged, I hear."

This was about the coolest thing Fru Johnsen had ever come across; now if it had been the other artist, the house painter's son— Not that either of them would have got Fia, she should think not indeed!—but could anyone actually go and do a thing like that under the very nose of Fia! And what did she say to it? Took it calmly and said: "Yes, they are engaged, I hear!" What the deuce could Fia be made of, was she positively cold? Now the next thing would be that the other young starveling, the painter's son, would come and beg on his knees for Fia; and then Fru Johnsen would show him how wide their front door could open!

Oh, what a world it was to live in!

Consul Johnsen took it much less to heart, he scarcely worried about it, but said something like this to Fröken Fia: "Oh, they're engaged, are they? Don't disturb me now!" Whereupon he returned to his paper and went on reading.

"Just imagine, these young lads that we did all we could for!" said his wife.

"Yes. But don't disturb me, do you hear?"

The Consul had other things to think about: that Lawyer and Storthings-man Fredriksen had been interpellating the Govern-

ment as to what steps it intended to take in the matter of the repeated complaints of the crews on board our ships. He did not directly mention the case of the steamship *Fia,* he did not do that; but he made no secret of the fact that even in his little town there were rumours of widespread dissatisfaction with the shipowners. The matter would have to be investigated.

It fell upon Consul Johnsen like a storm. This pettifogger, this unshaven upstart, he had been treated with wine and patronage in his house and he returned it by an attack! One had to put up with a good deal when one was Double Consul and a great man.

If Consul Johnsen had known what had preceded the attack it would not have surprised him so very much: he had his daughter to thank for this dirty trick of the Storthings-man. Look at her, there was the lady, there was Fröken Fia, bland and ornamental and innocent, and yet she had brought about an interpellation in the Storthing! It came to that. For not only had Lawyer Fredriksen been met with a refusal when he proposed to her, but she had actually offended him into the bargain. It came to that. And it did not take so very much to hurt Herr Fredriksen's feelings.

He was naturally rather surprised at her refusing him straight away. Here he was, having succeeded at last in being elected to the Storthing, no longer a mere Lawyer Fredriksen; but this did not seem to make any impression on her, she had not even asked time for consideration. "No," she said, with a smile and a shake of the head.

So of course he had taken it nicely and asked: "Cannot you give me any hope, Fröken Fia?"

No, he must excuse her.

And still he had taken it nicely and like a gentleman, and asked: "Then you are not free, Fröken Fia?"

Yes, she was.

"Oh," he said and was silent.

He couldn't understand her, couldn't understand the girl at all, and he must have thought she was standing in the way of her own interests. He withdrew.

The Countess found this unusual situation rather difficult to deal with; she was led into saying more, saying silly things, insulting things. No doubt she did it with the idea of being kind and smoothing away her harsh decision, but she laid stress on having been brought up in a good home and how inconceivable it was to leave it.

"You could have another good home."

It would not be the same. She was bound to her home by every tie, she was surrounded by cultivated society, refinement, illustrated papers, old-time culture—

The Lawyer looked at her. Whereupon he did not take it nicely any more, but began to laugh. She let him laugh, it did not embarrass her. When he was serious again he said: "But, my dear Fröken Fia, you could easily have all these things that you have enumerated, couldn't you?"

"Where?" she asked.

Ah—he couldn't get over *that*. The Lawyer was silent again, silent for good.

And now for some time after he was rarely to be seen in the streets, he never chattered with anyone, he grew reserved, sat at home and pondered, whatever he may have had to ponder over—perhaps the splendid dowry that he had failed to catch. It might reasonably enough be that.

Even in the Storthing he was a retiring man for the first few weeks; he voted the right way every time and made no mistakes, but he was silent. Until he spoke out on that question of the seamen and revealed at last the inward fervour that possessed him.

Oh, he made an excellent speech and moved the assembly, moved land and folk, his feeling for the oppressed was so great, his disposition so humane: It had been asserted that the ques-

tion had two sides; just so, that was precisely what it had. And now it would do no harm if the distinguished shipowners, who moved in cultivated society and boasted of their alleged culture, were to take a look at the other side. These ships might make the most fabulous voyages and pile up money for the owners, while their crews languished on the same rations and accommodation as in old days when men were hardier than now. And was their work free from danger, was it play perhaps? Members of the Government ought to go on board some of our merchant vessels and see what state the crews came home in very often: those who were not worn out came limping on one leg or had lost an arm, they were maimed in the service. In that state they returned to their dear ones; the speaker had seen examples of it in his own town. But when there was talk of improving the miserable lot of these men, it stranded on the opposition of the lordly owners. What if humane considerations, what if right and justice were allowed a voice! If the Government could not bring about a change in this wretched state of things, the Storthing could force them—if it would.

Naturally a Conservative replied to the speech, a shadow from the past who objected to its exaggerations: it occasionally happened, unfortunately, that a seaman was injured, but scarcely any employment was entirely free from danger; he had himself been a seaman in his young days—in his native town all the lads had to go to sea—and he had no such dismal reminiscences of the food and accommodation he had been given—

Stale words, old man's twaddle, Lawyer Fredriksen hardly listened to him. Perhaps he did not pay much more attention to the Minister who followed. This man could not think of anything definite to say, he hovered upon the face of the waters, he would give the matter his attention.

That was something at any rate, declared Herr Fredriksen, and to that extent he was able to acknowledge the goodwill of

the Minister. But he seemed to have adopted this coolness of set purpose, and perhaps he wanted it to be understood that he was not impressed.

The report continued:

The President glanced at the clock and drew the erroneous conclusion that the matter was now disposed of. The representative from Telemarken rose, "the Bleater," to oppose the closure and to intimate that he too had intended to speak.

"Ah, then there's not much hope that we'll be done just yet!" remarked the Conservative with a faint smile.

That told. But as it happened, it only goaded the majority: was not the representative from the dales to be allowed to support the lawyer from the coast town, a new man who stood so exactly on the right side in the question of the oppressed seamen?

And sure enough in the afternoon sitting Lawyer Fredriksen won a complete victory and got his Commission of Inquiry appointed. That might be called a promising beginning, his constituents might be proud of him—

Consul Johnsen read the paper, flung it down and picked it up again. It was a long time since he had been so upset; finally he passed the paper out to Berntsen, saying: "Read this drivel!" He was scandalized. Here he sat enthroned in his town, giving generous help right and left, taking cripples into his service, paying for their children's education at college, showing charity, doing good—and what did he get in return? Attacks! If only Scheldrup had been at home to undertake the defence; C. A. Johnsen was tired, this life of conflict meant starting afresh every day, he was not fit for it any more.

If he only had some place of refuge to go to! To the Postmaster again? Yes, if he absolutely wished to be overpowered with religious twaddle! No, then he'd rather take a turn up to his garden and pretend he was taking an hour off and would come back to

the office and start work again with renewed energy. Who could tell, it was a practical idea, a makeshift, a sudden inspiration, perhaps it came from heaven, it was quite possible.

And the Consul really did find some rest in his garden; his daughter sat there in all innocence painting lilacs and chatted with him; it was amusing to see how well she made it come out, how exactly like, and her general complacency had a beneficial effect on him.

"So you're hard at work, Fia?"

"Yes. It's for this blessed exhibition. Don't you think, papa, I can be rather proud of this picture?"

"Indeed you can."

"I think so too. And this is only the beginning, you know."

Oh, Fröken Fia was a strange creature, her life was full of saving clauses, just let her be as she was and she thought all was right. Her happiest hours were those she spent in the National Gallery copying and getting it like. Then if anyone would notice her painting and write something about it in the papers, she couldn't wish for more happiness. Hers was a good nature, without bitterness; she was at home with complacency, her ambition gave her no pangs.

Yes, a strange creature; she may have been deficient in one or two points, but her deficiencies seemed only to bring her blessings. Had she qualms of conscience? It did not look like it. She was quietly content with herself, did nothing wrong, felt no regrets, showed no sign of melancholy. What change could she desire? She painted and travelled and that was all; in the towns she had many friends, she had had many experiences, but no great experience. Some found her choked up with training, with artificiality: "Look here," they would say; "were you born with moderation, child? But there are such things as permitted and permissible audacities, Countess; for instance, you may safely fall in love, my girl!"—"Why should I?" she would answer.

What change could she desire? Could not all the long years wasted on trying to be a painter have been put to other uses? Why should they? They were charming years, a poetical mission, a calling, she treasured these years like an heirloom. She did her best, but made nothing of it, no indeed, but she kept on, it was a kind of obstinacy, she couldn't think of pulling up, of turning back, she wanted no release from her fixed idea, it was what she was meant for. No, she had no qualms of conscience and no melancholy.

And now, when her ageing father sat there listening to her and watching his reflection in her bland complacency, he may have thought to himself: God knows if Fia is not the wisest of us all! She knows nothing of the persecutions and punishments of fate, and the rest of us are involved in everlasting conflict!

"They've been down on us shipowners in the Storthing," he said. "They've got a story that we starve and cripple our seamen."

She did not flare up, but took it nicely, put down her brush and thought a moment: "Oh?" she said.

"Yes, of course! So that's how it strikes outsiders."

"Are you sorry about it?"

"Not sorry exactly. But it isn't pleasant for me, I'm getting old and worn, Scheldrup is away. Ah, Fia, thank goodness I have you!" he concluded.

"If only I could be any use! They haven't been down on *you*, papa?"

"They don't mention my name. But I'm pointed out pretty plainly by our own Member."

"By—?"

"By Fredriksen, you know, the Lawyer."

"Oh?" she said and thought still more.

"I don't know what I've done to him to make him go for me like that."

"It's simply want of culture," she said blandly.

Was it disappointment or deliberation that crossed his face at this reply? He was in no hurry to agree with her: "Culture? I don't know how much culture he has. There doesn't seem to be a call for it in our age. We are all equals now."

She said nothing. She had put on an obstinate look which he knew; she would not give in now.

"That seems to me one of the best things you've painted," he said. "So you think it's want of culture? I dare say you're right. By the by—you're not very fond of the Lawyer?"

"I?"

"No, I knew that, you don't care for him a bit. Of course he has some ability and will get on, but— You see, if neither you nor your mother nor I care about him it's not much use having him to the house. That's what I meant. We won't invite him in future; speak to your mother about it, she's been inclined to stick up for him."

So that was off his chest and now there was no reason why he shouldn't go.

"By the way, I hear he's got engaged here, that painter, what was his name? Was it to the elder or the younger of the girls? You must have heard all about it, Fia?"

She gave a little laugh: "I was certainly the first to hear about it. Between you and me, papa, I was go-between for both parties."

"Well, you're great, Fia! Go-between!"

So that was how she took it.

When the Consul walked back to the office he had not got even with the Lawyer nor had he made two thousand on a deal, but he pretended to himself that he had achieved something and he rubbed his hands as though he were eager for work. So it can't have been anything but a little artificial energy. He bowed to one or two people he met, bowed politely to the ladies—ah, yes, they acknowledged his greeting as that of a great man, they had not yet read of the debate in the Storthing. And yet—the ladies did not acknowledge his greetings as they had done in old days, there

was no swooning look in their eyes as when they used to meet him once; he had aged, young ladies now kept their eyes for ungrizzled hair, he would have to pass down the ranks, he had had his day. What then? He was the man he was.

He entered the office, looked at his watch and sat down in his chair. It's wonderful how a little breathing spell freshens one up! he might have said if he had believed it himself. Oh, but it hadn't freshened him up for long, Lawyer Fredriksen's interpellation was still raging in his head. Want of culture? Perhaps Fia was right. And she was certainly the cleverest of them if she only took a go-between's interest in spooning, devilish clever, that girl! He wouldn't mind if she kept off all that sort of foolery for the present; he knew by experience what an uncontrollable power there was in love, she would find it out soon enough.

Crippled seamen? And one was expected to keep them, to take them positively in one's lap and give them a feeding-bottle! If only Scheldrup had been at home! But Scheldrup, he was one of the hard modern kind, he thought of nobody but himself; he was now talking about a year at New Orleans.

And look here, the office was snowed under with work undone, his desk was a mass of letters, telegrams and bills of lading, surely Berntsen could come in and help to put it straight and get some of the things done. Was the Consul old? A little tired, fagged out; was it to be wondered at? But old? And even if he were old, he was the man he was. When his hair was getting thin he had himself photographed in a hat, in a tall hat.—

He got up and called Berntsen in from the shop.

"What young lad was that standing out there in a tasselled cap?"

"Frank," replied Berntsen.

"Frank?"

"The one the Consul pays for. Oliver's son."

"Oh, him."

"He's come for his new suit—the suit he gets once a year."

"I see. Look here, Berntsen, couldn't you lend me a hand and get rid of some of this? You see how it's piling up on me. You're such a quick worker."

Berntsen promised to find time in the evening.

"Thanks. See about the insurance of the *Fia* before anything else. Did you read the paper? What are we to do about the Lawyer?"

"Are we to do anything?"

"I don't know. No, perhaps you're right, we'll just let it alone and do nothing. But perhaps the Commission will come ask us questions?"

"Then we'll answer them."

"Right! We'll answer point by point. And, Berntsen, couldn't you manage to answer the Commission in that case?"

"Yes."

So now the affair was in the best of hands and the Consul was eased of a heavy burden. He was so relieved that he felt himself master of the situation once more and wanted to show off again: "That student, Berntsen, you might send him in for a moment."

Frank came in and stood before the great man.

"I'm glad to see you don't come home too often," said the Consul, addressing him as a grown-up man. "It shows your time is well taken up with your studies, doesn't it? I didn't recognize you, I had to ask Berntsen. You've grown so much in the last few years. You're at the University now; are you getting on well?"

"Yes, thank you."

"I'm glad to hear it. We all have to get on, you in your line and I in mine. What was I going to say?—as a young man, I trust you will beware of dissipation?" said the Consul suddenly. "Of all kinds of frivolity?" he said. Oh, that Consul Johnsen, he could have got a smile out of a tombstone; he went on: "Yes, you must really do that; you must be a sensible lad and resist temptation. I expect that of you."

Frank did not smile, he stood there tall and thin, bending low as if he were in church, and answered correctly and nicely Yes and No at the right places; the Consul was very favourably impressed with him. Was it the idea that this young man should carry away an advantageous memory of this interview with his benefactor? Who knows?—perhaps it might be to the advantage of the benefactor at some future time, if fresh attacks were threatened. In any case there was no harm in a little talk.

The Consul was quite justified in seizing this occasion to show the moral side of his nature: "There are noble pleasures and there are empty pleasures," he said; "as the years have gone on I have come to the conclusion that the pleasures of home and of the family are the real ones. One can dispense with the other pleasures if one seriously wishes to. That is my experience."

That Consul Johnsen! He had reached the age of cooling down, and now that he found his desires were deserting him he would not be done out of the profit of "overcoming" them. He was business man enough for that.

It must be said, however, that Consul Johnsen was not merely an empty show and nothing else; he had a heart, as was shown by his thinking for a moment of offering the young student a chair; but he thought better of it and did a more useful thing: he went to his safe and came back with a bank-note, a big red one, which he presented with the words: "Here's a little pocket-money for you!"

And Frank made the profound bow that he had learnt once upon a time of the dancing-mistress.

"You needn't trumpet it abroad," said the Consul; "we are told not to let our left hand know what our right hand does, isn't that so?"

"Yes."

"Ah yes, we are all human! But we must try to do the best we can. I suppose you're going into the Church?"

"Well, I don't know—"

"You don't know?"

"Languages come easier to me."

"Languages?"

"Philology."

"I see. Is there any future in that? Hm."

But it seemed to be rather a new idea to the Consul, whether it struck him that he might have spared himself his moral lecture, or whether he was afraid a philologist would hardly be so useful to him in the future as a clergyman.

He dismissed the boy pleasantly: "Well, now I've got some work to do!" But he did not turn him out, he went on talking in a friendly way: "Just think it over, whether you ought not rather to go into the Church. You know, I haven't behaved badly to your father or to you, I don't behave badly to anyone. But of course you must decide for yourself what you are going to be, I can only offer you a word of advice. Good-bye, young man."

XIX

THE YOUNG man went back to the shop and resumed his search among the ready-made clothing. As he was thin and narrow-shouldered he had no difficulty in finding a jacket to fit, but as at the same time he had shot up and grown tall, the trousers belonging to the suit would be far too short. There was one suit which fitted in every way, but Berntsen thought it too dear.

The good Berntsen was not all that he looked on the outside, mild and benevolent to everybody, but by no means a lamb. His attention to detail, his incessant care for the interests of the business made him tiresome at times even to the head of the firm; Fru Johnsen herself did not care to go to Berntsen, but preferred one of his subordinates when she wanted anything delivered from the shop. There seemed to be no pleasure in looking at dress materials and millinery in Berntsen's company. But he was an unholy smart man of business.

"In my opinion you're too young to wear a tail coat," he said to Frank. "We might think of that in a year or two."

Frank protested that Reinert already wore tails, though he was younger.

It was no use. What Reinert, the parish clerk's son, might wear was not regulation for everyone else; besides, he'd rigged himself out in knickerbockers once. But anyhow, said Berntsen very mildly, anyhow it did not matter about Reinert, his father paid for him.

The boy Frank had been trained early in life to understand refusals and what they implied, he didn't regard them so much as an insult, they simply kept him in his place, so that it was extremely rarely that he ventured above it; if he did, he was

ready to withdraw at once. He knew, of course, that it would always be managed somehow. So he took the suit that was assigned to him and expressed his thanks. After all, what did clothes matter to him? He had other things, higher things, in his head.

Reinert had been waiting for him outside, and the two students strolled through the streets together, not because they were bosom friends, but because they were students. Clever they both were, brilliant brains for languages, but Frank was said to be a good bit ahead of the other. This was what Reinert could not bear, he wouldn't play second fiddle, it often made him angry and inclined to take such revenge as he could. But in one way he took the lead, though he was the younger: with the girls, the ladies. Could Little Lydia resist him, could the little girls at the Shipyard? Here he had the advantage of a sense of smartness and fine clothes, starched collars, pointed shoes; besides which he had some spirit in him and didn't get bashful; catch him ever being crushed by a refusal. So it never occurred to him to turn off into a side street when they met Heiberg's Alice; he took off his hat and stopped. That's what he did.

And now it was Frank's turn to play second fiddle, he didn't get a word from the lady, scarcely a look. He would take care not to cast an eye up to the church tower to see what time it was, for Reinert had a trick of taking out his watch and showing off a locket with a lock of hair in it; of course the ladies must needs ask to see the hair, that was their silly way. Frank had a new suit under his arm and a solid bank-note in his pocket, for once in a way he felt on top and asked the lady: "How have you been since I saw you?"—"Quite well, thanks," she answered Reinert.—Oh, Heiberg's Alice was not such a fool as the rest of them.

"I'm just going to run home with this parcel," said Frank slyly; "I'll be back in a minute."

So he gave Reinert no chance to say: "Are you going home already? It's quite early, let me see!" But no, Reinert was no

sensitive soul, he had no delicacy to speak of, none at all; he replied: "I'll give you half an hour," and pulled out his watch.

Was it likely that Frank would turn up again in half an hour, was it at all likely?

At home he could assert himself much better; he was the master there and everybody waited on him. "Let me see what sort of clothes they've given you this year," said his mother; "Try them on at once." Frank told them that he had been called in to the Consul; mother and grandmother were thrilled with curiosity and asked him questions: "What did he want?" "Oh, the Consul!" Frank put on an air of indifference, sometimes he answered, sometimes he didn't; for at times silence is the best answer. They were so disappointed that he wouldn't be a parson, his grandmother couldn't understand it at all, since he had the brains for it. At that Frank smiled, such a faint and sad little smile, hardly anything, an attempt at a smile. The little girls passed their hands over his new suit; nice buttons, weren't they? and there was a little triangle of red silk hanging out of the breast-pocket, it was sewed in and stood for a handkerchief. The trousers were too short and his mother would alter them and let them down; she went to work at it at once, as Frank had to go out and pay his respects to the Headmaster. But his grandmother was lost in thought, she shook her head and muttered and didn't like it at all.

"So now they can say that!" she muttered.

"What's that they can say?

"That you can't be a parson." She must have been thinking of the women at the pump.

Frank said nothing. And that was a good answer.

"You must let Frank think it over," said Petra, who had not abandoned all hope.

Oh, but Frank was not going to let himself be talked over, his decision was firm, firm as a rock, ineradicable, for days and nights he had thought it over—be quiet, he knew what his calling was.

He called on the Headmaster. His trousers were too short and still remained so; his jacket hung on him casually as though it had been cut according to a grammar that gave a choice of forms. He looked queer and conspicuous, his cap gave him away and made a show of him. The path to the school had been altered since he was last at home and so he was a little confused and suddenly found himself face to face with a house. He said to himself and to a woman who appeared in the doorway:

"I must have been thinking of something else—"

"Where did you want to go?" asked the woman.

"To the school," he replied curtly, turning away.

"Then you ought to go that way," the woman cried after him.

Eh, that was strange that she didn't know who it was. Or did she know? At all events she didn't know him too well to be familiar and show him the way without being asked.

The Headmaster was tired out after the examinations, he was sitting in a dressing-gown and slippers, taking his ease and enjoying a syntax. There's nothing in the world like a calm and gentle syntax in a foreign language, so pure, so free from excitement, so genuine!

"Come in! Is that you, Frank? That's fine. Do you know this, Frank, my boy? It's just come, splendid! I ought to have had this syntax before the examination, but I had to grind away at the old one. You see, my daughter has taken French for me for the last year and so I had to get it up again for the exam. That's how it is in our subject; if we get out of practice for a while, we forget all we knew. Ah, but then, thank goodness, it's delightful to plunge into it again, isn't it? To kneel down in the cool shade of the temple and quench one's thirst at the fountain of knowledge!"

The Headmaster had grown old of late years, a grey-haired child with tired eyes behind his glasses. He was pleased with Frank, had heard nothing but good of him, wished him well in the future, placed the greatest hopes in him. Oh, with the industry

he showed he was sure of an honourable future; it was not impossible that one day he might be Headmaster of this very school from which he had proceeded.—

The old philologist was humble, his own life and his very habits had subdued him to a modest way of thinking, nobody could make less boast of his philology. He never mentioned the leaders, the men of original research; probably he knew nothing about them, scarcely their names even, what had he to do with genius! His vocation was not to make discoveries, he had only to teach, just teach. Teach so as just to make a living, teach so as just to be able to conduct his pupils through their lessons to the examination. The Headmaster had then done what was expected of him. A meagre and melancholy existence, poverty and intellectual darkness, decline, wear and tear, blindness. If only it were madness, that would be decreed by fate, a folly sent from Heaven; but this was human, ape-like.

And then the Headmaster talked about other promising pupils, one or two of them, brilliant future schoolmasters they too; Frank was now so far advanced that the Headmaster had time to interest himself in fresh cases of precocity. "Good-bye, Frank, my boy, God be with you!"

Frank went home, and he too was pleased, buoyed up. He had not had an opportunity of declaring in favour of any particular line of study; his old teacher no doubt assumed it would be philology, what else? And really it didn't matter so long as he read and learnt a lot: that was the object. Frank left the Head, the Head of the big stone school, and went home.

In the evening his father came from the warehouse and Abel from the forge; it made no difference to Frank, he had the little room in the old cottage for his home and his nest. The idea was that he should go on reading and learning in his vacation, should study, fill his memory, steep himself in languages, and he did so. By the time they told him supper was ready he had found something out, he had become even more learned and unearthly.

But all these meal-times were a great interference with his work.

He would come in with an empty tin that he had found in the kitchen and ask: "What do you think is printed on this tin?" No, none of them could say. But his mother knew the brand from the time she was in service at Consul Johnsen's; she proposed: "*Laks*, isn't it?" "Ah, but it isn't that in English," replied Frank, hurt; his mother was spoiling his wisdom with her practical knowledge; "it says *Alaska Salmon.*" Then his father intervened, he had been a sailor and knew many things: "Alaska's a country; do you think I don't know what Alaska means?"

So the salmon tin brought him no triumph.

They brought him other incomprehensible things. His mother came with a reel of thread: here you are, *Brook Brothers 50 yards*. His father intervened again and couldn't afford to spare his son; he announced the interpretation and swelled with pride. "Sailor's English!" said Frank. Altogether the master of the house, Oliver, remembered his English in a very disagreeable way, he reduced the greatness and mysticism of the occasion by deciphering his wife's packet of needles: *Silver Eye. Cast Steel.* "It ought to have been in small letters," said Frank. His father didn't understand that: "Why should it have been in smaller letters?" he asked. To this Frank gave the only right answer: he said nothing. And all at once he had a well deserved reputation. His mother produced a box which she had got in a shop; on it was printed: *Toilet Soap. Superior.* No, this stumped Oliver, every word of it was strange to him; Frank had to come to the rescue with solemnity.

There sat his brother Abel, not understanding a word of the performance and saying nothing. What a difference between the two! For a moment a slight pity for Abel seemed to stir his learned brother's heart; he had just come home, you see, and didn't want to ignore him completely: "Well, well, Abel," he said, "there's no witchcraft in it, you might have known as much

as I if you had studied!" Abel smiled rather self-consciously and shook his head.

Thus on many occasions his belongings enjoyed the advantage of Frank's linguistic achievements, scholarship had entered into Oliver's house. Strange that none of the neighbours called to ask for interpretations of mysterious and outlandish words in a newspaper or on a packet of tea. They had no sense of refinement or intellectual riddles, they were dull and lazy. Such were Frank's surroundings.

One evening Oliver came home and said: "Well, when you've finished, Frank, when you've had something to eat, I've got something to ask you about!" A certain excitement prevailed during supper, Frank was the only one who was calm, he had no doubt of being able to answer.

Then the moment arrived: Oliver laid something on the table. The old sinner laid a pack of cards on the table and asked Frank what was printed on the wrapper. A pack of cards! the women were scandalized, but Oliver quelled the storm: "Shut up, you!" he said. "I've heard all that before, and I shouldn't touch such things or carry them home with me, only that Olaus the grazier asked me to."

Frank did not take it amiss, he took it nicely. He had not had a chance of showing any great linguistic knowledge lately and had no objection to giving another performance. "*Whist à 52 Blatt. Verzierte Asse*. Now, Abel, what do you suppose that means?" asked Frank, still in an obliging mood. Abel gave his helpless smile and had to leave it unanswered. Frank began: "Strictly speaking we have here three distinct languages." Whereupon he explained the meaning from the first syllable to the last, not for an instant was he in doubt. Fabulous! Meanwhile Abel had got hold of the dirty pack and showed that they were quite ordinary aces, what was the meaning of that? This caused Frank to reflect deeply and he declined to discuss the point: "But I will vouch for the original text," he said.

Oliver had been listening in silence, and now he exclaimed "Marvellous!"

They all looked at him, and in fact he had put it rather strongly; Frank did not seem very brilliant. But then on former occasions Oliver had put Frank down and spoilt his market with his English; now he wanted to make him amends. He had a way with children; he put on an air of rapture—what brains his son had!

Was Petra jealous? At Oliver's remark she grimaced and tossed her head: "Your son?"

Oliver was dashed, his face grew vacant, his mouth slackened, his fat fingers lay lifeless on the table.

Petra explained. "He's not your son only, he's mine too, isn't he?"

Slowly Oliver recovered himself: "Well, who said he wasn't? Of course he is, he's your son too!" And now Oliver recovered himself splendidly, he was right-minded again and refused to make any distinction between the sons; he included Abel and said: "Ah, when I get you two boys nicely started and trained with all useful knowledge then I've done my share. More than that I haven't the means for."

The next evening Oliver was able to explain the truth about the aces: that scoundrel Olaus the grazier had put in a pack that didn't belong to the case as a practical joke, thinking to catch Frank. But Frank was quite equal to it! "And you were right too, Abel; the aces were just the same as I've seen all over the world wherever I've been. And that's what I say, you've both got knowledge, thank the Lord."

All the same, Frank made no brilliant show, whatever may have been the reason, but these séances at home didn't seem to bring him in enough. Or how far did they reach? There was neither length nor breadth, it was a confined space, father, mother, brother, two sisters and grandmother. He had the idea of bring-

ing out learned schoolbooks, mathematics, he said they were, transcendental calculations; ay, he would read aloud about geometry, algebra, differential, integral calculus, a circle whose curvature is equal to the curvature of an arc at a given point is called the osculatrix of the arc, its radius is called the radius of curvature—

Oliver was knocked flat: "It doesn't sound like human talk!" he exclaimed; "do you have to learn things like that?"

"We have to learn everything."

He had got far above his class and his talk was outlandish. Nobody could understand it but himself. Where would it end? He asked Abel: "I don't suppose there's a single foreign newspaper to be found in the town, is there?"

"I don't know," replied Abel. "But the Borough Surveyor takes papers."

"Foreign ones? In foreign languages?"

"I don't know. What about the Norwegian ones?"

"Norwegian!" Frank sniffed contemptuously.

In this little sailor's town everybody knew some *Engels*, who didn't know *Engels!* But the boy Frank knew too much of everything, he was reduced to talking to himself, had to ask himself questions and answer them, nod, shake his head, have his doubts and his beliefs in silence. Now and again a groan reached Grandmamma in the old parlour; it came from his little bedroom, from the rock to which he was chained.

Abel was incredibly simple-minded; he would pick up a book and ask: "What kind of a book is this?"

"Latin. You don't understand it."

"Oh, is it printed in Latin then?"

Frank made no reply.

"Will you come for a sail with us on Sunday?" asked Abel.

Frank shook his head doubtfully: "Who's coming?"

"We shall be two or three."

"From the Shipyard?"

"No—from the Shipyard! They're too small. Little Lydia's coming."

"Little Lydia!" scoffed Frank.

Incredibly simple-minded, Abel; he felt no rapture in reading a book, he talked like a blacksmith; "Little Lydia," he said. Frank had never cared for sailing, now he cared still less for it, and he was accustomed to keep to himself. He no longer associated even with Reinert, the two students now appeared separately. For the good Reinert was getting a little too uppish in public; he wore a tail-coat and a locket and was full of grown-up talk; one day he bowed to Fia Johnsen in the street and complimented her on her hat. That was too much; Fröken Fia passed by in silence. Frank had taken care to stand well aside while this happened, but Reinert was impudent enough to drag him into the scandal by laughing aloud and saying: "Did you see that, Frank?" Frank took the shortest way home.

And besides, he had other things to do than to loaf about with Reinert, bowing to the girls, the ladies, and joining them in a walk. An empty amusement. On the other hand, he called now and then at the Shipyard; Henriksen had taken him up out of respect for his learning, and he sometimes went for a walk with the eldest of the little girls, Constance, and told her things that belonged to a greater world than hers. You see Constance was still a little girl and had not quite finished growing yet, but she was forward for her age and listened gratefully to all he told her about the great world. Those were pleasant walks. Frank behaved nicely at Henriksen's and said If you please and Beg pardon, he was given a cigarette and took it out of his mouth to speak, he drank his coffee genteelly, cocking his little finger. There was no question of a love affair, only a little solace to the heart, a relish. It could be seen what Reinert's impetuosity led to; his heart would give a great jump in broad daylight and in

the middle of the street, it gave him a frivolous desire to whistle, to sing. Frank kept love affairs at arm's length.

When Sunday came and Abel called to take his sisters for a sail, he asked Frank once more whether he would not join them.

"No."

"We're taking grub with us, we shall go ashore and dance. The Drawing-Pin's taking his concertina."

"No."

All the same Frank's eyes followed them rather wistfully as they went off, he felt a faint gleam go through him, a reflection of life outside. The poor boy had been astray from the beginning. He watched a blue pulse beating subterraneously in his wrist, his chest was growing hollow, at eighteen his child's brain had attained a rare age.

It delighted his grandmother that he refused to go for the Sunday sail; this gave a hint of the future clergyman! Grandmamma had orders not to disturb the student, but she timidly opened the door with a cup of coffee and begged him to take it.

That was just what he wanted.

"And you did quite right to stop at home," she said.

"Well, what should I go for?" he replied.

He had no doubts, he made no mistakes; in staying at home he was keeping prudently on the right side. He was not aware that only he who does nothing cannot make a mistake.

Then he plunged his nose into his books again. And the mealtimes were a great interference with his work. In reality when they told him dinner was ready it only reminded him that he was not hungry, which he knew before.

XX

AND INDEED it is quite possible that Abel made a mistake in arranging that sailing trip; Little Lydia failed to turn up and the day was wasted. He stuck it out till evening on a verdant isle, hopping and dancing, shouting and playing the fool, but as soon as he was home again he went off to dig out Little Lydia and find what she was up to. He did not find her; it was Sunday, Little Lydia was at Policeman Carlsen's getting some practice on the piano.

Good.

Next evening he went after her again and did not find her. She was out; her sisters were at home.

Now Little Lydia must have got word that he wanted to speak to her, but she did not give him a chance, she avoided him. Well, there may have been some perfectly natural reason for her not being there; she would certainly be at home the third evening.

No.

That gave Abel a set-down. No doubt he still thought the world was a possible place of residence, but it wasn't an interesting world and life was beastly and unnecessary. Today he had seen Little Lydia in company with a couple of other girls and Reinert—Reinert, that parish clerk's son who was everlastingly running after the girls—yes, in his company Abel had seen Little Lydia. That was a nice thing. The same Reinert might be all the better for being taken down a peg or two and Little Lydia badly wanted putting in her place. Abel would do that, he'd put her in her place. But that sort of thing was not to be done with a sledge-hammer, it required patience and infinite delicacy. You can't always sail into port, sometimes you have to warp.

He proposed not to call on the girl any more, not he!—better to come across her accidentally in the street. But all the same, when a couple of days had passed without his seeing her, he was off again to the familiar back-yard.

In the interval he had calmed down and flared up again many times; at the moment he was furious enough, but when he found the girl he could only say: "Well, have you done gadding about at last? When we get married you'll have a different kind of game! Why didn't you come for a sail on Sunday?"

Little Lydia had perhaps expected him this evening, perhaps too she was prepared to show him more friendliness than usual; she smiled and nodded as though returning a greeting, and said: "Is that you, Abel?"

That disarmed him. His intention was to make a scene, but for one who proposed such an enterprise he was reduced to a remarkably crest-fallen stare.

It was Little Lydia herself who did not shrink from realities: "The reason I didn't come on Sunday was because I was going to play the piano. I couldn't do both things at once."

"No," he said. And yet he knew very well she hadn't played the piano all day, but only in the evening. Besides, she had promised his sisters to come, and had thrown them over. The deuce knew what it meant.

She sat there sewing on the rickety little wooden steps, mending or altering a dress; she was handy at needlework. Then things took their usual course; it must have dawned on her that she had been attacked, and why should she put up with it? This blacksmith boy and his sisters seemed to think they were her equals, but they'd have to think again: "I have a little more to learn than you," she said. "Perhaps you think it's easy to play the piano?"

"No," he said.

"The notes are so frightfully difficult to start with. And then there's all the practising."

"But why have you got to learn it?"

Oh, how simple he was!—why had she got to learn it? Because all respectable people learnt it. She had learnt to dance, she had to learn to play the piano, to do fine needle-work, to crochet borders for her chemises, oh, what hadn't she to learn! Even carrying a parasol in the sun was not born in her, she had to practise a way of doing it, a grand style. Her sisters had learnt all sorts of things too, they were not nobodies either, they didn't intend to throw themselves away, they sat at home, waiting for a ship's officer, a commercial traveller. That was how respectable people behaved.

So Little Lydia was not particularly offended at Abel's words, she simply made no reply to them.

Abel was left dumb.

She had taken off her thimble for a moment; he picked it up and improvised: "What can this be made of, with those sort of veins in it?"

"That? Ivory."

His sense of ivory was not much developed; he had heard of the glories of Solomon's Temple, but not of thimbles. However, the devil must have entered into him; he put down the precious thimble and passed his hand once over the blue washing dress she was busy with, saying: "As far as I can guess, this is brocade."

She instantly interpreted this as the sarcasm which perhaps it was, and replied: "You're no judge of such things!"

Silence.

"I suppose you haven't a step to spare?" he asked.

"A step? Why, do you want to sit down? Here you are!"

She got up and made way for him.

"No, that's not what I meant," he expostulated. "If there isn't room for us both on the step I'll stand up." But now he had got started and went on: "What was I going to say?—no, that's all

nonsense about playing the piano. What use will that be to you when we're married?"

She positively collapsed on the step, she shrank to a point and it was a good while before she recovered her speech: "What? Married to you?"

He looked at her searchingly, as though trying to be unbiassed. He couldn't see that she had as it were taken him by the nose, only slightly of course, but taken him by the nose and shown him the way out and let him go.

"I shall never marry you," said Little Lydia.

From these words Abel concluded that she gave him a refusal, but all the same he stood and looked at her, looked at her quite unavoidably and blinked his eyes a little now and then. That was a strange way she had of talking, just as if she didn't want to take him. She could do as she pleased, good luck to her, what did he care? For the moment he was in a grim frame of mind.

Little Lydia looked up with a smile, nodded and said: "I mean what I say." —Oh, but then she saw she had spoken very sharply, unnecessarily sharply no doubt, and she might well relent a little: "You might help me and hold this," she said, handing him a pleat to hold.

No, he didn't move.

"Do you hear?" she said, pricking him in the calf with her needle.

He gave a jump and, the deuce knows why, he got angry, he got mad. Without a word beyond a single shriek of "Ow!" he stood for a moment biting his lip, pale, looking as if he could say a whole lot. It didn't make him any pleasanter when Little Lydia burst out laughing. What in the world—a young man who made nothing of snake-bites and was used to raising blood-blisters on his hands at the forge, and he jumped into the air at the prick of a needle! But he did. And now she really saw she must behave nicely: "My! isn't that Reinert a jackass!" she said.

That recalled Abel to himself, reminded him that he had come to save her, to save Little Lydia. "Yes," he agreed.

"A stuck-up thing!"

"Yes. Didn't you know that before?"

"But he's a smart young fellow. And his hair's nice and curly."

"Oh, then perhaps you like him?"

"I? Mamma says he's come on wonderfully. And then he's learnt an awful lot."

"Ha ha ha," said Abel. "Rot," said he. "Has he learnt such a lot? I know a hundred times as much, I can tell you that. Yes. Not exactly about books, I don't mean, but I know a hundred times as much about other things."

"Oh, other things!" she scoffed.

"A hundred times as much, remember that! And you'll just see, he won't be any parson. It's just the same with Frank, he won't be a parson either. A parish clerk's boy like him! And if you're going to believe in a fellow who looks so much bigger than he is, then you're a silly, I can tell you that."

"I? It never occurred to me to care for him."

That altered the case and Abel must have felt all at once relieved, he could kiss her now, actually kiss her on the mouth. There she sat. But kissing a girl by surprise is a difficult matter, it demands technical ability, you've got to hit the right spot. No, instead of that he took the grindstone by the wall, lifted it out of its socket from sheer playfulness or ungodly strength and laid it in her lap.

Well, people talk about being mute, but he had never heard such deafening muteness. Then she shrieked, did Little Lydia, she bellowed, indignation made her odious and unlike herself. There was nothing for it but to lift the grindstone from her lap and put it back in its place.

"You pig!" she sputtered. "How dare you—!"

"He he he," he laughed, shamefaced and unhappy. "Whatever can have made me do it!"—It was extraordinary, by the way,

how little it took sometimes to put Little Lydia in a rage. He himself was not like that. She must have had it from her mother.

"Look what a mess you've made of my sewing," she said. "A clean frock!"

"I'll put it under the pump," he offered.

"Idiot!"

Then he tried to talk her round again, hinted darkly at his feelings for her, said he loved her and meant to have her, he didn't care what she said; he would go to all the pumps in town for her, she must excuse his silly trick with the grindstone—

She stood up and shook out her dress with suppressed wrath, beat the sand off it, flopped down on the step again so that it creaked, and kept her mouth shut.

"And besides," he said, "I wish I hadn't done it. And it's nothing to make a fuss about."

"Oh," she replied, looking up at him angrily. Her eyes went through him.

"I wonder where Edevart, your brother, is now?" he asked.

"Be quiet!"

"When is he coming home, do you know?"

"Be quiet, do you hear? hold your noise!"

"Certainly!" he said with a nod. "Just tell me what you want," he said. With that he retired into himself.

But that sort of thing could not be kept up. After a while she got up suddenly and began again to knock the sand off her dress as though it were not clean already. But now she was almost pleasant again and even smiled a little.

They were not so very old, these two. Supposing he was nineteen, then she was only seventeen or so. Or if we were to tell the truth and call him only sixteen, then she was still less. What age was that! And there they stood.

"What did you mean by it, you rascal?" she asked, laughing.

"Mean? I don't know."

"Why don't you sit down, I say!" she said, and sat down herself.

Now it was his turn to be silent and he simply stood leaning against the rail. But when she gave him another pleat of her frock to hold while she sewed it, he took it. Then she said, pointing to his hand: "That's a queer lot of hair you've got on your hands."

"Queer? It's good enough."

That hair! It had sprouted in the heat from the forge, a black fell, he had been proud of it, none of his companions had anything like it, he had outgrown them all, they were left behind. And what a manly pair of hands he had grown!

"I'm thinking of staying out my apprenticeship with Carlsen," he said. "What do you think about it?"

"I don't know. How long will it last?"

"It won't last long. And after that I can have the forge cheap, says Carlsen. He'll help me."

"The forge? What do you want with that? Oh, to forge in. But are you going to be there all your time?"

"It's about as good as anything else. I don't think the others are any great shakes either."

"But you'll get so black," said Little Lydia.

"And when the time comes and we get married—"

She did not fly up any more, she did not do that, but she cut him short very decidedly: "That'll never come off!"

"—then we'll be able to have a house to live in," he said.

"Never!"

"How do you mean?" he asked in bewilderment.

"I don't love you," she replied.

He looked at her hands, looked at her face and thought it over. "Well, that'll come right," he said in a tone that implied she might consider it settled.

But once more Little Lydia showed herself the daughter of her

quick-tempered mother, she was not going to sit down under that: "Let go!" she ordered, tugging at the frock.

But of course fingers like his didn't let go for a simple tug.

"Didn't you hear I said let go!"

"All right. Just tell me what you want."

Then he let go, and then they were at loggerheads again.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said Little Lydia.

He replied with a grown-up air: "So then I'm not more than twenty, if that's what you mean. Or perhaps not quite twenty yet."

"My goodness, what fibs you tell!" she cried. "Why, you're hardly anything, if it wasn't last year you were confirmed, it was the year before. Do you think I don't know when you were born?"

At that Abel laughed: "Oh no, Little Lydia, you must excuse me. When I was born you weren't even thought of. Oh, I'm not so far off twenty, whatever folks may say. And I ought to know myself."

"Oh"—Little Lydia waved him off impatiently and said: "I'm to be confirmed myself in the spring."

"Well, that's a good thing."

"A good thing, what do you mean by that?"

Silence. He must have thought it a good thing to get it over and done with, then she would be free and ready for him; but he dared not irritate her any more.

"There, now I've done my sewing," she said, getting up.

"Well, good-bye," he said. But then he was bold enough to ask for a glass of water.

"I don't know that there is any here," she replied, looking about. "But you can go in and get a drink."

To this Abel said: "No, I can go home and get a drink. It doesn't matter."

"Not at all!" cried Little Lydia. "I'll go and fetch you some

water," she said, as though he were the only one in the world to her.

When he had drunk it they went on talking for a while, and before he left he had managed after all to hug her and kiss her a few good times. They were frightfully supple and risky arms the smith's boy had.

He swung them as he walked home, a lord of creation, the man of her choice, owner of a prospective smithy. Yes, everything was coming right! He would have liked to hide himself away from company, but they had a visitor at home, Maren Salt was in the parlour.

They were all present except the student, and they got a great deal of talking done in a short time; Maren Salt was in a hurry, she had only gone out to do a little shopping and had had a fancy to look in on these old acquaintances. Oliver himself put in a weighty word now and then, while their visitor drank a few cups of coffee and ate bought cakes with it.

"How did you manage to get away?" asked Petra. "Is the baby asleep?"

"I don't know. Mattis has got him."

"Mattis?"

"I'm sure the baby's safe with Mattis."

"You don't mean to say Mattis looks after your child?"

"Oh, don't I? Why, how do you think I'd manage?" asked Maren Salt. "I had to go out this evening and buy in things for the house, and Mattis, he stops at home. He does that every time, there's nothing else for it."

Oliver expressed himself with dignity: "It's my opinion that Mattis will take you, Maren, when the day comes for him to change his condition."

Maren Salt had no objection to being told that, but Petra seemed almost to feel a touch of jealousy: "I don't believe it," she said. "Well, well, it's all the same to me!"

"He might do a more foolish thing," asserted Oliver, taking

Maren's part. "Then, he'll have the boy to teach his trade to and to take over the workshop when the time comes."

"Oh, the boy he's only just properly born yet," objected Maren. "So that's looking a long way ahead."

Petra said: "I wanted to go and look at him. He's a big baby, isn't he?"

"No fear for that. The Doctor says he's well bred."

Petra pricked up her ears: "Did the Doctor say that?"

"Yes, is there anything odd in that?"

Silence. Petra was thinking. "No," she said at last. "It's only something the Doctor says. He said it about mine too, that they were well bred. I don't know what he means."

Oliver spoke again: "As far as I understand he means to say that the child is big and strong and healthy, for instance. Well, thank God, ours have all been bonny."

Petra asked: "What kind of eyes has he got?"

"Brown eyes," replied Maren.

At that Petra again seemed altogether jealous and odd, and she couldn't resist exclaiming: "Where have you been and got brown eyes for him?"

"He he, wouldn't you like to know!" replied Maren Salt with a coquettish laugh.

"I've guessed it all right!" said Petra, stern and bitter. "He's everywhere!"

Maren looked at her: "How you do talk! Who do you mean?"

"Nobody. I don't mean anybody."

"No, you'd better not, either," said Maren, "for you won't guess it!" And she looked wily and mysterious and said no more. A deuce of an old girl; then who was the father? It looked as if she herself were considering the question; nay, as if she had a choice and couldn't make up her mind.

"Isn't there a drop more in the pot for Maren?" asked Oliver.

A fourth cup was poured out and drunk, and meanwhile there was more talk of many things. One would have thought Petra

might have recovered almost all her good humour, since she could see that Maren Salt herself sat there with brown eyes—so was it any wonder that her child had them? But Petra seemed once for all to have fixed her suspicion on a particular man and she could not give it up: "It is him all the same!" she insisted. "He's sly enough, he took one with brown eyes this time so as to be safe."

"I don't understand your scandals, Petra! Yes, I don't mind saying straight out, you're talking scandal," declared Maren, still with a friendly laugh.

Petra was indignant and forgot her manners before her visitor: "Do you think he took you for anything else but your brown eyes? No, Maren, you know well enough you're not a chicken!"

At this stage it probably occurred to Oliver that he ought to intervene, and he did so by taking his hat and limping out. He took Abel with him. They left behind them five females, young and old. But Petra was too excited to be any good company for her guest, and if Maren Salt had not exercised moderation she might have broken her coffee cup. As it was she was cut to the quick: "No, I dare say I'm no chicken. But what about you, Petra? you're not any yearling either, remember that. And as far as that goes, I should think you've had a pretty good deal of that man you're suspecting me of."

Now Petra must have noticed that the little girls were listening; she resorted to laughter to pass it off: "I've had? Not a farthing have I had from any man but my husband, I tell you that! What should anybody else give me money for? Thank God, we have enough with what Oliver earns!"

This was leading the conversation into another channel, but a bridge had been thrown across and over it they went; the two wrangling mothers made peace after a while. They turned to gossiping about the town and its people, the fifth cup of coffee was poured out, all the women folk sprawled over the table star-

ing into each other's faces: There was a nice to-do again at that Kasper's, him that was working at the Shipyard; he'd beaten his wife, that was the last thing. Maren had heard it this evening.

Petra flew into a rage with Kasper: "What had his wife done?"

"Of course it was something about another of the workmen."

"I'd like to have seen him dare to raise his hand to me!" threatened Petra.

"Oh ay, but what a wife he's got!" said Grandmamma, who was old and burnt out. "What didn't she do that year the husband was at sea?—shipped aboard a foreign vessel and was stewardess in foreign parts a long time."

"It was a strange thing she didn't get a baby," observed Maren Salt.

"How do you know what she got?"

"Ah, but then she'd have had more children afterwards."

"No," said Petra, "she's not the kind that gets babies, she can do anything she likes."

Grandmamma was absorbed in this old adventure, the young sailor's wife and her escapade in foreign parts; there had been talk enough about it at the time. "And such an excellent father she has, Blacksmith Carlsen, a good, respectable home, and then to go like that!"

"That's the way with them sometimes," said Maren Salt. And she had more news from the town: Chandler Olsen's youngest daughter had been married in Christiania in the middle of the month.

In Christiania, why was that?

It was in the paper, Maren had heard it read out in Davidsen's shop.

"Who did she get?"

"A painter, it said."

The little girls knew all about it: "That painter who painted

the pictures at Johnsen's of the Wharfside and at Chandler Olsen's," said the little girls; they were well posted, the olive branches; oh, they were sharp enough.

"He seems to come of big people, from what Davidsen said."

Strange that it took place so quietly; nobody had heard about it.

To this Maren Salt replied: "They say the bride hadn't any time to lose."

"Ah, that was the way of it!" came a whisper of comprehension from the whole room. And then they all meditated upon it for a while.

"Ay, they all get married one after the other, there's no end to it," remarked Petra. And she ventured once more on dangerous ground: "You may think yourself lucky, Maren, that you haven't been caught!"

"It's not too late yet, is it?" said Grandmamma.

"Well, that's what Petra thinks," replied Maren, taking fresh offence.

Petra didn't give in: "Without I'd tell you a lie, I should think you've put that sort of thing out of your head for good and all. How old are you?"

"I'm so old that I don't remember," replied Maren, getting up. "Well, I mustn't stop here all night! Thank you so much for your treating and all, and mind you look in when you're passing, Petra!"

No indeed, Maren Salt was no chicken, but as she walked home carrying heavy parcels as if they were nothing and tripping along like a dancer, nobody could accuse her of old age. Nor had she any looks exactly, her brown eyes were pale and hadn't a spark of glow in them, but it showed what a woman she was if she could have a baby at her time of life. Don't say anything about Maren Salt, she was good enough. Were Jörgen Fisherman's and Lydia's daughters any better—sitting at home and playing the lady—were they any better? And even Fia John-

sen herself, was she so much better, she who spent her time painting lilacs and looked at a man and a milestone with the same eyes?

"I've been a long time," said Maren Salt as she came in.

Mattis did not answer and altogether was not friends with her. Moreover he had been singing to the child and was in the middle of a verse.

What if I tried him with a little town gossip, Maren may have thought; something about Kasper and his wife, or about the wedding in Christiania? But Mattis was not a man who cared for news. "Has he been awake?"

Mattis finished the verse and replied: "No. But you'll wake him now with your noise."

"That don't matter, it's time to feed him," she said.

A notable sight—Mattis the carpenter singing by a baby's cradle.

He had been snorting and he had been hopping. He was the victim of a terrible and insane trick of Fate and had not got Maren Salt out of his house before she was brought to bed; it told on him and upset him beyond measure. In his own house, by all the devils! But it wouldn't be long, oh, it would only be a couple of days, three days, and then she'd be out in the street—quick about it now, and don't forget to take the brat with you! But more than three days passed, and then day after day went by; it was an awkward thing to take a shovel and clear her out, and where was she to go? And with a perfectly new-born child, a powerful chap he seemed, with an infamous pair of lungs, but all the same—

Mattis the carpenter was a forgiving man, he had once forgiven a pair of doors that he was cheated out of, he forgave a young woman who diddled him in the matter of a gold ring, and so forth. He flared up and snorted and made a fuss, but he forgave. What else could he do?

And then Maren Salt was soon on her feet again and attend-

ing to her work. The baby didn't make much difference one way or the other, it didn't have to have any food, only the breast and its sleep, it lay in Maren's little room, in her own bed, and didn't take up any space; Mattis found many reasons for not proceeding too harshly. But in six months' time, in the middle of summer when neither of them would freeze to death, then they'd be put outside, that was certain sure! Or at the latest, in a couple of years, when the boy could walk on his own feet.

Then he swore he would never have the baby in his sight, but that did not work. Maren Salt, the mother, might have run round to the pump; the baby didn't arrange its howls accordingly, but coolly summoned the carpenter. This went on for a few times, Mattis ground his teeth and was an exceedingly angry man, but not a man of stone; he noticed that the child stopped crying when he spoke to it, that it grew calmer at the sound of a human voice; this led to his speaking to it more and more and the end of it was that he took to singing. When the child opened its eyes and began to know him, he lifted it up and carried it. This little ogre, this mite that felt so funny and weighed nothing in his hands—be quiet, none of these screams that the journeyman and the boy can hear out in the workshop, stop your noise! It's no wonder you're crying, though, poor little thing, you're cold and you don't get fed; I'll speak to her, my word! I shouldn't be surprised if she overlay you one of these nights in that narrow bed. Look here, now we'll take off your own little blanket and carry you in that. There, you see, that makes it warmer, doesn't it? and now by the Lord, I'll talk to her—

"He's freezing in here!" he called to the mother.

"Is he freezing?"

"I don't know and I don't care to know. It's not my business. But you're not to let him lie here starving to death."

"He's not starving."

"Do you think he's crying for nothing at all? What a thing to call a mother!"

Maren Salt had found that it answered to humour the carpenter: "I'll give him the breast," she said.

"And plenty of it!" ordered the carpenter. "I don't know when he's howled worse than this time."

Then Mattis goes back to the workshop, to the journeyman and the boy. He is angry and ashamed, he turns at the door and says to Maren: "I'm not going to come in to him every time, you needn't think that; I don't care if he yells himself to death. But we must have peace in the workshop, no crying babies in my house. That's so. He can't lie here and yell himself to death."

And so Mattis went into the workshop; the journeyman and the boy were ready to leave. He poured abuse upon Maren and the baby: "Ha, one has to put up with a lot! But wait a bit, it shan't go on much longer. I know somebody who won't have them in the house any more. If it wasn't that it's against the law to turn them out; but there's a heavy penalty for it, one of the heaviest. You know that, don't you?" he asked the journeyman.

The journeyman didn't know much about it, but thought it not unlikely.

"A terrible penalty, several years. And I don't want to risk that."

Just now he was at work on a little bed, a child's cot, for a family in another town, he said, and he had had the measurements given him, so that order was all plain sailing. It was to be a nice little cot with rails and even a little carving on the ends, and he had orders to get it painted white before he sent it home. So he worked away at it. But it was a queer thing about that little song, that nursery rhyme, he couldn't get it out of his head for days, he caught himself humming at his work and making himself ridiculous. A man with a nose like that humming nursery rhymes at the bench! He suspected his journeyman of not being altogether serious.

Without a doubt it was a joyful day for him when he could send his apprentice to the painter's with the cot.

And still more joyful he might have been the day he got it back, shining white, and could pack it up and send it off. But it seemed that Mattis was the victim of another trick: the little cot had been countermanded, the family had bought one ready-made, Mattis had received a letter about it. There it was, another trick. But this time Mattis took it with remarkable calm and said: "It can't be helped, I can always get rid of the cot. But it's just what I was saying, a man has a lot to put up with. No, it doesn't do to bother about these orders from another town!" said Mattis.

In short, the cot was left on his hands.

And now the youngster was welcome to the loan of it meanwhile, Maren Salt's youngster; he could use it for a week or so, till it was sold. It didn't do the cot any harm.

XXI

TRUE IT was that a wedding should generally take place at the bride's home, but Consul Olsen, he celebrated his younger daughter's wedding in the capital, in a palm court at the big hotel. His head was not devoid of plans, God knows if he hadn't had some idea of a foreign country for the wedding, the Argentine perhaps, or Australia. It appealed to this man of spacious ideas to make a splash and be talked about on such an occasion; a big hotel was all right, you could just ring and get five waiters. It was doing the thing handsomely and it had its practical side, for his wife would be spared the huge strain of the entertainment.

So the painter, the magistrate's son, was wedded to his model. There was some cavilling in the bride's native town at its taking place in such haste and without warning; all things considered round the pump, there was something odd about it. But in any case the young lady had abandoned trade and abandoned Scheldrup Johnsen; he was no longer the favoured one, but another.

To this wedding Lawyer Fredriksen was invited, and as Storthingsman and Chairman of his Commission he was already present in the capital. He was not to be omitted; a person of importance, there was now something official about him, he was almost marked with the Norwegian Lion. "Welcome!" said Chandler Olsen, and showed his guest to a place of honour.

And here on this occasion it was that Lawyer Fredriksen intended to lay the foundation of his happiness and come to a provisional understanding with Chandler Olsen's other daughter, the elder one. It was to be a secret, they would wait a bit, God knows why, but that was part of his plans for the future, said the Lawyer; presumably he would not remain a Storthingsman

and nothing else all his life. But the provisional understanding was to be gloriously binding.

So now it looked as if Chandler Olsen's other daughter would also abandon trade and the smart business men. She was a big, healthy girl, had a lovely mouth and a wealth of heavy *cendré* hair; the Lawyer for his part was getting on in years, was no gymnast, passibly grubby in his person, with no Grecian nose, but a devil of a fellow, without much hair, but with a rich fold of flesh at the back of his neck—there was thus a shade of difference between the two. The Lawyer was good enough.

He came home to the town. Why, of course he had at once been made Chairman of the Commission on the maltreated seamen and he carried his head high; what a career! Not that he actually walked anybody down, but his voice seemed to be more powerful than ever, there was thunder in his throat. No doubt it was the result of his practice in the Storthing, when he delivered his famous interpellation.

He took a walk in the streets in the afternoon, there might be several people who would like to have a word with him on his return from the capital: there was the Doctor, who wished the Double Consul joy of the interpellation, the Collector of Customs, who was a Liberal, the young Magistrate's Deputy, himself a budding lawyer, and then there were many more in the ranks of the people. And the Storthingsman grudged no one a word or two in passing. For some reason or other he cared least to have the Doctor hook on to him just now, but it couldn't be avoided, the others went their way, but the Doctor continued to hang on, he was the same as ever.

The same man he was, and his standing in town was the same. The Doctor did not change, he visited the sick, wrote out Latin prescriptions, believed in his learning and his science and earned his daily bread. The evil of each day was sufficient unto him. On rare occasions some small joy might fall to his lot, as when Henriksen of the Shipyard paid him heavily after his wife's

death; but on the whole the Doctor was a man without joys. He had taken his orders from one tradesman, from Johnsen, with whom he was displeased, and given them to another, to Davidsen, whom he wanted to try; but they were both alike, Davidsen sent in his bill too. The poor man was a Consul, but he was not rich and he had to look after the pence; they were all shopkeepers. At present the Doctor had no regular tradesman.

He deserved no envy, there was nothing showy in his existence. Naturally he never complained of himself, of his having been denied the power of reforming, of improving his lot, of his having made a failure of life, of being a lost sheep, a grumbler, a fool, bumptious in spite of all the dubiousness of his character. It was the other people, the town and to some extent Providence that were to blame. Of course it was. He himself was as he should be.

Oh, how he could have growled and grumbled!

The Doctor had no taste for a real risk, a danger, but he did not shrink from a dispute; on the contrary, he gibed and pin-pricked whenever he saw a chance and was dreaded not a little on account of his tongue. A gadfly, a wasp he was. It pleased him to be a man whom not everybody dared to answer; that gave him a triumph for the day, for the hour, he sniggered and laughed over it. Malicious by nature he was not, far from it; he had acquired these qualities, his schooling and methodical training by book had made him what he was. No, he didn't achieve anything respectable in the way of malice either, he had begun too late; only as an elderly failure did he arrive at a peevish discontent, at bitterness, spite, petty vindictiveness, slander. When anyone died this physician with the dangerous tongue would say: "Well, now there's a pair of shoes for someone to step into!" And it gave him pleasure if his hearer received it with a rather queer expression.

He could not leave the Storthingsman alone either, but stung him gaily from one side or another. Thus the Doctor could not approve of a man like Lawyer Fredriksen sporting high-heeled

shoes even if he had been made Storthingsman, he walked badly enough before. The new frock-coat might pass, but that kind of shoe on a foot like his!

The Lawyer was not aware that there was anything wrong with his feet.

"That's because you haven't studied anatomy."

"I know all the anatomy I require."

"There we have it: men get into the Storthing and don't require to know any more than they know already!"

"Now and then one can apply to the local Doctor in one's constituency and supplement one's knowledge."

"Ho, it wants more than supplementing, you must begin at the beginning, my boy!"

The Lawyer had no desire to squabble; on the other hand he couldn't provide this disrespectful fellow with a triumph by getting angry and leaving him. So he stayed and held his tongue; oh, but he took care to show all the time how little he thought of this Doctor: "There we have Barber Holte now. Good evening, Holte," he said, stopping in the hope that the Doctor would go. No, he didn't go. "What's your least busy time of day, Holte? I want to get my hair cut."

"Do you mean to say you can be bothered to go to the barber's and sit down and wait your turn?" asked the Doctor. "Why, you can get him to come to you."

"We democrats are not so grand as that," replied the Lawyer.

"Grand, did you say? No, God knows you're not!"

They met Mattis the carpenter, and "Good evening," said the Lawyer again, greeted him with a few words and let him go.

The Doctor said: "Ah, that worthy Mattis, he's another that's got the brown-eyed breed in his house. He was not pleased about it!"—But here an association of ideas led the Doctor to another subject and he said abruptly: "That interpellation of yours was stunning. That's the way to give it him, the swine!"

The Lawyer replied deprecatingly: "No, that interpellation is

the thing that pleases me least of what I've done up there."

The Doctor was ready with his sting: "What else have you done?"

"Well, nothing," said the Lawyer, unwilling to squabble.

Having made the great man small enough the Doctor had achieved his object and could afford to make a show of friendliness: "Of course a great many things go on in the Storthing that we outsiders know nothing about; the work of committees, for instance, to say nothing of commissions. It's a good thing you're probing into the relations between sailors and shipowners; I hope you'll probe them to the bottom; why on earth should these shipowning creatures make such heaps of money? Ignorant and uneducated persons who have learnt to stand behind a counter, but smoke cigars with gilt bands, drink old vintage Madeira, give their wives and daughters diamond rings—it's enough to make one sick! There, I'm damned if that isn't the Postmaster! Well, you must excuse me, I'm off. He's come out to air his belief in a plurality of existences again. Can you imagine anything worse than that man? The mere fact that his whole life is consciously and incessantly directed to goodness, he he! Offspring! he says and rejoices in his children. He's an idiot. I hope you'll excuse my running away, I won't be so hard on myself as to listen to him.—Good evening, Postmaster! Out on the watch for God as usual? We were just talking about you."

"I am grateful for all the good you gentlemen have said of me."

"And supposing there was some evil?"

"At any rate you did not listen to it."

"Oh? But I too think of myself first."

"For that very reason," said the Postmaster.

The Doctor gave a start and said: "Bless me, then you think it's to my own interest to speak well of you?"

"Yes, I do. To speak well of everyone. Herr Fredriksen, welcome home again!"

Now the Doctor had intended to go, but there was something in the Postmaster's gentle correction which invited him to linger a moment and at all events to show his sting: "Postmaster, you don't belong to this world. You believe in goodness and say: 'What are we to believe!' This world demands logic and reality, not sentimentality."

The Postmaster had the advantage that in all disputes he stood on his own ground, where all was familiar to him, where his cogitations at any rate had provided him with a standpoint. It was probably this which so often put him in the vein, made him ready to defend his opinions, vigorously even at times. Moreover the Postmaster was no lamb, he could wound on occasion, with downcast eyes and a little smile. What he said might be nothing much, a few fairly courteous words, but they were not always guileless.

"I do not know what this world demands," he said. "For that matter it ought not to be a question merely of what it demands, but also of what it ought to demand. Logic being as faulty as it is, perhaps the world needs something outside it. I don't know. Logic does not carry us forward."

"Oh yes, in science."

"You don't say so!"

"Don't I? Science has no use for metaphysics and superstition; that is its logic."

The Postmaster shook his head: "Science dances round with its spear outside metaphysics and stabs and stabs at it without doing it any harm. Does it do any harm? No. Because this fundamental vital force is invulnerable and eternal. You can't stab an ocean."

"Have you been at the People's High School?" asked the Doctor.

"No. I was never at any high school—as you were."

This caustic remark tempted the Doctor to rudeness: "It wouldn't have done you any harm if you had been. Then per-

haps you wouldn't have ended up as Postmaster in this good town."

"That's nothing very great, you think?"

"What do you think yourself?"

"I am content. Some other people cannot repress their desire to appear great, even if they really are great. That is a fault in some other people."

"It was science we were talking about—"

The Postmaster interrupted: "No, you must excuse me! I am not—like you—a man of science; I cannot discuss scientific questions."

"That is a fault in you," replied the Doctor, and continued: "Scientific truths are one of two things or both—they are self-evident or logically demonstrable. Very well then, metaphysics is neither."

"But, my dear Doctor, I never said or thought that metaphysics was science. I take it to be rather the opposite."

"Then it is rubbish, my dear Postmaster, and nothing else! If we had no science what should we have at all? Moses and the Prophets—let them settle it between them!"

"Metaphysics steps in where science finishes. That is what it does."

"Science is never finished. It feels its way, it does not always reach its goal, but it works on and on, it is always advancing."

"Yes, that's what they say," replied the Postmaster. "I expressed myself incorrectly, by the way; I too meant to say that metaphysics starts where science does not quite reach its goal. At the two or three points, trifling points, details, where science has not exactly reached the absolute apex. By a mere hair's breadth—let us call it so."

"I see, you're sarcastic! He hé, and you believe in a whole system of existences as the explanation of life's mystery. That is what lights you on your road."

"What is one to believe!" replied the Postmaster. "At times

it gives but little light, it is like stars at night. It is not a strong light, it is not sunshine and clear daylight, but it is like stars at night. Enough to distinguish things by."

"Would it not be better to have the light of science as far as it will reach?"

"I have that too. It is where it stops that I have to manage without it. Then science is left far behind—that is to say, a hair's breadth behind—and watches me as I go."

"No, now you must excuse me, science has something else to do than to watch you. But inasmuch as it stays behind, it does wisely enough, it requires firm ground under its feet."

"A ground which shifts with each alternate generation."

"Yes, so the fools say, those who know least about it. Do you suppose that mathematics changes its foundation, for instance?"

"I don't offer it as a reply, but merely to amuse you a little more—mathematics from the very beginning has to 'assume' something. It searched in the light of my stars and found a wretched X to stand upon. An honour for X, which stands for something better."

"In plain words, mathematics is good for nothing?"

"Do you say that? It is certainly good for a great deal to people who are fond of sheer, pure intellectual work for its own sake. Mathematics stands alone and is what it is. But it is entirely negligible for our spiritual life."

The Doctor clapped both hands to his ears, as though to stop them, an involuntary gesture due to perplexity. Why had he brought on this purposeless verbal warfare which bored him and tired him out? He did not go so far as to stop his ears; he seemed to waver for a moment between uttering a scream and taking to his heels, then he checked himself, and even achieved enough of firmness to raise his hat and say: "Thanks, now I've had enough! I've got to take my poor science to visit a patient!" He turned off into a side street.

As the Postmaster also showed signs of going the Lawyer de-

tained him; they were about to pass C. A. Johnsen's shop, the Double Consulate, and the Lawyer wanted to have someone to talk to in front of the windows. Oh, he knew what he was doing when he took this road; he meant to go right out to the Double Consul's house and beyond it, up to the Heights, to the Belvedere. He had his reasons.

The Lawyer raised his voice to the voice of the interpellation: "Everything you have said, Postmaster, may be very good in its way; I am greatly in sympathy with it. But would not all this metaphysics and spirituality render us unfit for life here below? Would it not act as a brake on our activity?"

"Without presuming to instruct you, but since you ask the question—I do hope it will check us a little. Make us shrink from taking an unfair advantage, restrain us from fleecing each other too openly. I suppose you wouldn't think that a bad thing?"

"No."

"Now we labour senselessly at pushing each other aside in order to thrust ourselves in; we must compete, we are told, and more than compete. What if we were to work a little more at ourselves instead of for ourselves?"

"But then if it is precisely this work at ourselves that weakens our taste for worldly activity? Then we shall not get on in the world?"

"But we ascend in life. Imagine if we now and then reminded ourselves that we shall not live for hundreds of years at a stretch here below! We come into the world, gaze at everything for a little while, and go out again. I assure you, Herr Fredriksen, we can get on without getting on top of other people."

"We are variously equipped, perhaps also variously designed. Napoleon's activity was of this world, he wanted to get on, even by trampling on others."

"But it was not that side of him that conferred most felicity on himself and on the world."

"That was no doubt his destiny. His and others'—we will act according to our instincts."

"We assert the superior forces of destiny, yes. That gives us a lovely excuse for our own behaviour."

Ah, now the Postmaster was beginning to take too many liberties, perhaps he even meant to be personal; the Lawyer would not have anything of that sort, it was not for that he had brought him along. "I'm going right up to the Belvedere," he said; "I suppose you won't go so far?"

"No," replied the Postmaster, and turned about.

Lawyer Fredriksen drew a long breath, everything was going according to his calculation, he looked at his watch. The best of all was that he had got rid of the Doctor, as he was aware of that man's strained relations with Consul Johnsen and was unwilling to be seen in his company just now. Spirituality and metaphysics be blowed, that kind of thing gets in the way of our life here below, and are we not to succeed in the world? He did not actually propose to walk anybody down, Lawyer Fredriksen would not do that, but he would not be checked in his career either. Herein he showed his healthy desire of activity. No—run a man down, plunge a knife into him? Not a bit of it! Consul Johnsen's right-hand man Berntsen was probably expecting a domiciliary visit and cross-examination, but nothing of that kind would occur, his master the shipowner would be left in peace.

Why indeed should he be more disagreeable to Consul Johnsen than he had been? The Lawyer had shown his claws; he did not wish to use them, the Chairman of the Commission had humane reasons and Lawyer Fredriksen intimate reasons for behaving leniently.

He walked past the Double Consul's house with its carved gables and balcony and veranda; a big house, a garden with lilacs and jessamine, a scent of wealth and culture, a fountain, cement urns, butterflies, flag-staff, everything there should be. He turned up towards the Heights—just as he thought, Fia was taking her

evening walk, Fröken Fia was refreshing herself after the day's work. He had not forgotten her, nor had he given her up; he looked upon her as before, as the pauper looks at the millionaire. It was to be supposed that his prospects with her were improved, perhaps the lady would not continue to stand in her own light and make false calculations. Had not she and her family by now acquired a respect for his doings in the Storthing?

There, she caught sight of him behind her and began to walk fast.

Oh, the lady didn't calculate well at all, she had had no practice in calculating, no need to calculate. What she was made of God alone must know.

She still increased her pace, but it was no good, he overtook her, and sure enough he received her final answer in that rosy evening hour. How she hurried on, how she sought to avoid him! She must have had a mighty yearning for the beauties of sunset to make so great an effort. But Lawyer Fredriksen was not the man to give up.

He bowed before he came up to her and said, panting: "You've nearly walked me to death, Fröken Fia."

She was once more the Countess, elegant, pale, with many perfections, rather dressed up as usual, chilly: "I'm sorry. I was thinking of something else; I generally walk up here so as to be alone."

"Is it a good thing to be so much alone?" he asked. "What do you think about when you come up here?"

"About all this!" she replied, pointing to the universe, to the clouds, the ocean, nirvana. "Yes, it does me good." And she seemed scarcely to understand this man, this animal, who stood there, incapable of a noble enjoyment of Nature. To think that anyone could miss it!

"I have just come home from the Storthing, I wanted to have an opportunity of seeing you," he said.

"That was kind of you."

"You yourself have been abroad for a while?"

She answered: "I come and go, you know. I'm going to now."

That's the very devil! he must have thought; everything on grand scale, Notre Dame, the Eiffel Tower, Rothschild. And at that moment he probably felt a certain fear that he was beneath her, since he said: "What are we Storthingsmen and lawyers to say about really great things? That they are unattainable. But we can attain a good deal, you and I, Fröken Fia."

Obscure speech for the lady.

"I mean we too can rise step by step, attain higher and higher positions. That is the good thing about a democratic community, that everyone can rise to the highest offices."

Silence. The lady did not seem to be estimating his chances.

Well, then Lawyer Fredriksen passed on to his real business, gave her to understand what she was for him, that she was absolutely everything to him, and could she now give him some hope, a little more hope than last time?

"No," said the lady.

Did he hear her aright, would she not think it over this time either?

"No," she said with a shake of the head. "And now look at that sunset," she said, "that is much better. Look at those colours! How splendid the world looks from here!"

He did not give in: "Yes, the prospect is fine enough," he said, "but what about the prospects?"

She gave him a questioning glance.

"My prospects? My future?"

At that she really grew somewhat annoyed; he might well have chosen rather different words when she was showing him colours. Was there no poetry and culture in this person? "No, excuse me, you must discuss your future with others," she said.

XXII

OLIVER HAD to suffer for it, an innocent man who had done nothing to thwart Lawyer Fredriksen's plans. Why should he have to pay the penalty?

Oliver was slinking home from the warehouse when the Lawyer came up with him and at once went to business: "Well, Oliver, you've got a permanent situation, it's time you paid off your debt on the house."

What had brought it about?—the Lawyer had just come down from the Belvedere, from a transaction in which he was a loser, and perhaps he wanted to gain on another. Had he no great faith in the binding arrangement with Consul Olsen's daughter? Or was he suspicious about the dowry? In any case he spoke sharply and to the point, like a man who was forced to save what could be saved; oh, there was nothing doubtful or rambling in his words.

Oliver simply replied that how could he pay off the debt on the house with his wages at the warehouse, which were just enough to live on?

"Well, what concern do you suppose that is of mine?" asked the Lawyer. "Sell the house and pay me my money, then we shall be quits."

Then what was to become of Oliver and his family?

"There we are again," interrupted the Lawyer. "You seem to be counting on some sort of a duty on my part. Think again: the house is depreciating in value year by year, you don't even keep it painted, it's rotting away."

"I was thinking of getting it painted last summer."

"No, it won't do, I can't have it any longer. You know where

my office is—either you or your wife will come and see me." With that the Lawyer left him.

Naturally Oliver had to send his wife, she had managed it once before and she was better fitted for it. And as it happened Petra was looking her best just now and very cheerful, and she had got a new set of underclothes so she was in remarkably good spirits all through. Nobody could blame her for that. And she wanted to go off right away, that very evening. Oliver objected that the office would be closed. "Then I'll knock at the door of his little room," replied Petra. Oliver could not help admiring this zeal and admonished her: "Well, let me see that you make him understand the threats he's put on a cripple!"

When Petra was gone Oliver took out of his pocket the sweets and cakes he had brought for himself and the little girls. He made no distinction between them, but divided fairly, and the one with the blue eyes got almost the largest share, because she was the nicest and really the sweetest, when you came to think of it. Strange that it should turn out like this. The father had been expecting for a long time to see a horse's nose on this blue-eyed face, but was blessedly fooled. In his joy thereat he took to the blue-eyed child at least as much as to the one with the "family eyes." He had beaten Blue-eyes once; when she flopped into the sea off his own quay. He didn't limp, he flew to save her and drew her up from the deep with his crutch. When she opened her eyes he uttered a cry and gave her a couple of smacks with his clenched fist, soaking as she was. His joy took the form of a momentary fury. Otherwise he never beat his children. That was the mother's work. Oliver was the one who had the best way with the little ones, and they gave him their whole hearts in return.

Now the three sat there cosily together, with their little secret of sweetmeats. It was just as if they were dividing and eating up stolen goods, they had great fun at frightening one another—now Mamma's coming, Grandmamma's coming—they set aside

a little for their brothers, for the student and the blacksmith's boy. Oh, there was nobody like their father for making a children's feast. Then he told them about his voyages in distant seas, how he had been about the world and seen people who could eat burning tow and dogs that drew milk-carts. "Goodness me!" said the little girls. Ho, that was nothing to what he'd seen, monkeys, peacocks, camels, just the same as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had, savages with rings in their noses, waterspouts, burning mountains, one time he had seen a pirate-chaser, a clipper, three-master, with thirty-one sails set, another time a murder in a café in broad daylight. "My!" shuddered the little girls; "didn't you ever get attacked by nasty people yourself?" It would have taken something to attack him, he replied; to attack the man he was in those days, he replied. Worse luck, it was his fate to be crippled and a broken man. The little girls pitied him, and the three sat there like three womenfolk.

Then all at once they thought they heard somebody coming; the father made haste to clear the table, at the last moment he flung two whole buns into his mouth and sat still with immovable jaws. Oh, he looked wildly comical, like something stuffed, with his solemn face and his mouth full of buns. False alarm, nobody came, the conspirators were saved. Then the little girls were seized with wild merriment, they asked their father questions to make him talk, they tickled him in the ribs, pinched his cheeks, laughed, laughed themselves into fits. Their father had to get up on a chair to finish chewing. Three children.

After a while Frank came in, the student, grey and worn after his day's work, as though weakened by debauch. He took his food and his cakes and ate them in silence; he was still busy with the meagre memorizing he had just left. There was something sad about the boy, in his ready-made charity clothes and with his hands that had no grip. He was so full of languages and so immature.

Oliver, his father, seemed to think there would be no harm in

his putting in a word or two with fatherly effect: "You mustn't study so tremendously, Frank, it'll make you poorly. And according to what I can see and understand, you know more than any man in town, as far as that goes."

Frank said nothing.

"Now tell us a little bit of what you've been reading and finding out today."

Oh, they didn't understand it, but Frank gave them a hint or two, so that they might have a little glimpse of the thing, mentioned verbal forms, suffixes, dissimilar elisions; he humbled himself very, very much and explained cases, explained genders. The speech of the savage—he has it in his head, he gets it out through his mouth, sounds, a painfully acquired figment of the brain which occupies him night and day, birds' chatter, a tremendous tangle. He treated this as something fine and precious; when the little girls repeated a word wrong, he corrected them, and the little man was full of his own greatness, in his learned ignorance he had reached the cocksureness of the schoolboy. Nobody had taught him to reflect; under the pressure of his task he had simply plodded on and on; there could be no question of his having misused his time and his powers, he had reduced life to philology, but did not feel that he had been cheated. So he wandered on through his wilderness, a foolish, empty pilgrimage, not for the sake of reaching anything, but simply and solely to be one of those who walk in the wilderness. That was his life's work.

He bored his hearers and his father yawned, but did not go as far as the little girls, who rose from the table. Frank noticed their defection, it hurt him a little and made him cross: "Yes, it's worth while trying to teach you something!"

The little girls hurried back to their chairs and their father excused them: "They'll never learn it anyhow, it's too deep. But we all think it's as strange as anything we ever heard. And I've heard niggers talking in foreign parts."

But Frank was put out of humour, he was fagged out and couldn't stand much; he got ready to go out, to go right away from them.

"Are you going out?" asked his father.

"Yes."

"Well, all right, thanks for what you've told us this time. But that German words should have genders—and I've heard more of the Germans than most people—but if you say so—"

"You got your tie on all wrong," Blue-eyes warned him.

As Frank was a whale on accuracy he corrected this sentence, pulled it to pieces and showed how miserable it was. Oh, but it was hopeless to struggle with them, they had not begun to learn languages when they were eight years old. So he went out and forgot his tie.

The three were left together. They too were out of spirits, they could not recover their humour, and the Brunette was annoyed with Frank. His father excused him.—"Yes, but he's not going to be a parson, what must he learn all that for?"—"Be quiet. The Schoolmaster isn't a parson either, but a learned man. What are you talking about!"

Then Abel came home, and as he had already had supper at the Blacksmith's he was only given two little goodies. But Abel was a queer fellow in his way and when he had demolished the sweetstuff he produced a further supply from his pocket which he had brought for the others. For of course Abel had his regular meals at the Blacksmith's house, but at home they lived anyhow, and his sisters might often go supperless to bed, and perhaps their father too. As Abel put the two little bags on the table he shouted at them that they were not to touch the sweeties—"I bought them for myself," he said; "don't you dare taste them, I'm going to have a treat tonight." Whereupon his sisters and his father flung themselves on the bags and devoured the dainties. —"Robbers," roared Abel.—"Have you got any more?" asked

Brunette.—"I'll give you more!"—"Ha ha."—But then his father whispered: "What about Frank?"—It turned out that Abel had two cakes in his pocket specially for Frank.

They ate and enjoyed themselves. Mother and Grandmamma didn't count, those two drank plenty of coffee and enjoyed themselves in their own way, they often had their private junketings. It was Oliver himself, the father, who had introduced these little secret feasts; they began with his desire to be kind to the little ones, but degenerated as time went on, as this man found it less and less necessary to deal openly; it was easiest to meet the children in the passage and give them a bit of sweetstuff which they could swallow on the spot. Oh, they all had memories of these happy wiles, of this Papa who did good by stealth. Do you remember this, do you remember that, they said to each other. Altogether there was nobody like Papa.

There they sat.

"Look at his hands and wrists," said his father, pointing to Abel. "Just the same kind I had myself when I was an able-bodied man."

"Let me see, Abel," said Brunette, plucking the hair on his hand. He yelled and complained to his father: "Can't you speak to her, you're older than I am?"

The evening wore on and they were a family party; the world outside did not concern them. They had no yearnings for anything better, and what should it be? Blue-eyes had actually got a little colour in her cheeks from eating cakes. A picture of a father surrounded by his children; he had a soft and fat exterior and looked innocent if not examined too closely. Such children he had! The little girls were intelligent, quite as intelligent as they need be, sharp as the very devil; they were sly, they guessed a lot. Frank was already learned and Abel was already a man. Nothing could be better; it only wanted sweeties to make it a paradise.

Now it was time for Abel to go over to Grandmamma's side,

where he lodged. He had a bench which made his bed at night. It answered splendidly, Abel was tired and slept like a log. And now it was time for him to go, for he had to be at the forge early in the morning.

A little while after the girls went to bed too and Frank returned to his little room; Oliver was left alone at the table. He thought Petra was a long time, what on earth could she be about? he yawned, took out his pocket mirror and looked at himself. When Petra came in he intended to ask her what she had got done all this while; he wouldn't fail to put that question to her.

When at last Petra did come in she had a piece of news for him; she warded off any disapproval by saying straight away: "There's a foreign steamer in."

The former sailor swallowed the bait at once: "Where?" he asked.

"He came into the quay."

Oliver forgot all else for this piece of news; he limped out to have a look. He stayed out a good while and when he came back he was able to show off his expert knowledge: "He's an Engelsman by his flag."

"An Engelsman!" cried Petra.

"He has the same kind of ports as the grain boats, so he must be for Chandler Olsen."

In order to humour him she kept up the pretence of an exaggerated interest and exclaimed: "For Chandler Olsen—what a one you are to find things out!"

"Yes," he said; "I haven't been all over the world for nothing."

Here she took the opportunity of interjecting: "I dare say I was a bit long at the Lawyer's, but you see, I had to talk to him."

"Yes," Oliver agreed, and asked: "What did he say?"

"He grumbled."

"The bloodsucker. If I only had the use of my limbs! But what was the end of it?"

"Well, he gave in a bit. He's going to give us time. But it took some doing to get him to go that far," said Petra.

"Yes."

"I was to go back next week," said she.

Well, at any rate that was a respite; "Let me see you manage it," said Oliver. "Give him an answer back to all he hands out to you, the monster."

Then he left the house again. It was this Englishman that excited his interest, his seaman's heart yearned to the foreign steamer by the quay, he wanted to see her at close quarters, to sniff the smell of her, a vessel from foreign seas and ports, English language, half-naked firemen, the skipper aloft on his bridge. He came upon a number of inquisitive townsfolk on the quay, he met Jörgen Fisherman and the inevitable Olaus the grazier with his pipe in his mouth.

"It's fine you came down," said Olaus. "Now you can help me to get a pipe of tobacco. They don't understand what I shout to them."

Oliver had no objection to being the one who knew English, and when a gangway was run out he climbed aboard. But Olaus was the same unalterable old Olaus; he made a face at the tobacco they gave him, there wasn't more than would go on his thumbnail and he'd tasted better, plague take them! "Isn't there somebody else with good strong tobacco—where's the mate?"

Then it seemed that the English sailor understood the Norwegian words, but perhaps he only read them in Olaus's discontented face; at any rate he put away his tobacco and went off.

Oliver followed him with his eyes and a far-off memory flickered through his mind. Had he met this foreign seaman before or someone he reminded him of? He might have seen him in a seaport, in a street, in a shipping-office, but where? The world is so wide and Oliver had been all over it.

He found another of the crew and tried his almost forgotten English on him, found out where the ship was from and to whom

she was consigned, everything interested him and took him back to his old life at sea. He found out how much cargo the boat carried, what was the number of her crew, how old the skipper was, how long they had taken coming from the Baltic. In return Oliver said what he was, an old seaman, began when he was a little nipper, was A.B. when he had his accident, when the oil barrel came and smashed him. Well, that wasn't yesterday either, and a few years ago he had salved a big derelict, practically on his own; that wasn't bad for a cripple, was it?—it got him into the papers; now for many years he had been Manager of Consul Johnsen's warehouse yonder. He was married and had several children by his wife; one of the boys was a student.

Olaus the grazier got pretty tired of listening to all this talk in an unintelligible language and went ashore. The Englishman was more patient; he turned out, by the way, to be the mate, the second mate, but he was not a bit stuck up, on the contrary, a regular brick, and he even showed some interest in this funny little town he was to discharge in. Oliver had the best impression of him.

He went ashore full of knowledge and could collect his acquaintances to hear his report. Jörgen Fisherman was a faithful listener, stolid and old; he stood where he was and listened, didn't say much, hung on the speaker's lips and didn't go away, no, he was no sprinter. There was something obedient about the worn old fisherman, his wife must have bent him down in the course of half a century. Oh, but he was too solid to be one of the restless ones. You see, old Lydia was bad-tempered and capable, to this day she was the smartest washerwoman in town, to this day she was a rasp, but she had never got her husband to hurry himself, he was heavy and simple-minded, he had a stoop. God knows, perhaps he had rather too many daughters of the house surrounding him, filling up chairs in his room. His son Edevart was at sea.

Though the foreign ship was an ordinary cargo-boat Oliver

bragged of her as if she had been his own: he had gone about on board and had a look round, the cabin was all mahogany and golden gilding—

"You weren't in the cabin," interrupted Olaus.

"Oh, I wasn't in the cabin, wasn't I?"

"Do you mean to tell us you were in the cabin?" Olaus shouted; "the skipper's ashore."

Oliver gave in: "But I went past the cabin and saw it all. I don't understand why you can't ever hold your jaw." He turned to the others and continued: "The captain must be a rich man."

"Did he tell you so himself?" asked Olaus.

At that Oliver broke off, the Warehouse Manager broke off, thinking himself too good to wrangle with a person who was so far beneath him. The cripple had his pride.

But Olaus had his too. He too stood where he stood; had anybody seen him give ground? When Oliver and the rest left the quay Olaus stayed behind, for nothing in the world, except to be the one who didn't go. A stiff-necked and perverse creature, without malice, but so sadly loose with his tongue. He was a drunkard for life, but never bent his head and never begged for anything but tobacco. He was impolite and did not touch his hat to the town worthies. His tremendous health allowed him to sleep anywhere, indoors or out.

Not a skipper, a doctor, a consul, none of the commonplace characters of the little town, but a longshoreman with a tobacco pipe, a piece of wreckage with valuable iron in him, there was something of a man in the poor devil.

He too might well have had a thing or two to howl about, he too was a cripple, knocked flat by an accident, spoilt about the face, a man with one hand, but thank God still a hand; he didn't take to tears, he just got on his hind legs, ho, he diluted his sorrows with brandy and stood them. A queer fellow in his way—it didn't occur to him to steal directly, he could be trusted with goods on the quay, but he was a glutton at charging for his

work and if he had the chance he would fleece you. His impudence was really straight and honest, he didn't steal away and hide, but came forward as the man he was, rude and irresponsible, sure of himself. All in all a man with good and bad qualities mixed together. Was he ever known to make little trips to the neighbouring towns simply for the sake of fighting? Not a bit of it, Olaus made these little trips so as to do a little desperate drinking and brace himself up. His missing hand didn't trouble him, he couldn't take hold with it, but he could lift and carry. A one-handed man's luck is not being without hands. That is what it is. Olaus did not despair, he had a hand. He looked down a good deal on fat Oliver who limped along the quay and hadn't even legs, poor fellow.

The two cripples despised each other mutually and there is no doubt that Olaus was the superior. Oliver knew this and could not curb his envy; it took the form of officious compassion for his brother in misfortune, he pitied him because his calamity had made him a drunkard so that he raged and beat his wife.—"I don't beat her," yelled Olaus; "it was only when she started going with other men. You mind your own wife."—At that Oliver grew so compassionate that it was a sight to see: "It's such a pity the way your face looks, but it's still worse about your hands. You can't help yourself anyway at all, you can't even thread a needle. I feel very sorry for you."

Well no, Olaus couldn't thread a needle, that was just one of the things he couldn't do. Nor was he smooth and hairless and womanish about the face; on the contrary, he was sharp and bony, dark-bearded and dark-complexioned; the mining charge that had been blown into his cheeks sat there for ever and would not grow lighter. Oliver's face was smooth and round as a baby's bottom, with hanging cheeks and slobbering mouth. There was little that was attractive in Olaus; in Oliver there was something repulsive. Oh, but after all it was he who had the great pull, he had a wilier brain, more gumption. Did he not

have a bright idea at this moment, as he walked home in the dusk of the evening?—maybe here was a chance to get rid of his eiderdown, to ship it quietly out of the town and out of the country.

You see, he had this eiderdown up in his loft, a locked-up capital, it would hurt nobody if he liquidated it, on the contrary, it would profit a whole family, Oliver's family, which was threatened with ejectment. Regarded as crime the whole affair dissolved into nothing; it was distributed over a hundred pilferings of a handful of eiderdown during half a generation. Had any of the town worthies a clearer record for the same period? And anyway, the thefts were already committed, it could not very well increase his guilt if he disposed of the goods and secured them from moth and rust. Might not eiderdown suffer from lying too long in a loft?

Other folks were not a whit better than he, whether it was that they were not enterprising enough to carry out a stroke or had never been forced to it. Often enough they would like to do the same, it worried them a lot to keep off it, but they were fettered, they were the prisoners of their own honesty and it vexed them that they could not break out. That was how it was. Then what could be looked for from a man like him, like Oliver, a poor cripple with a big family? Could not he be just as upright and exact in his dealings if he had been able to afford it? But when had he been able to? He spent his life like a mushroom in the dark, Manager of a warehouse with temptations in every corner, so cold in winter that it gave him chilblains, and in summer with a smell of liver and oil that took away his breath and knocked him backwards when he opened the warehouse door in the morning. Who could wonder then that he was not altogether innocent and soft of soul? So much of what he had to do was darkened by a shadow, there seemed to be an understanding between darkness and him—in fact,

the wonder was that he hadn't murdered the Double Consul and stolen his warehouse.

But he had more sense than that, he didn't commit follies in broad daylight. His method of weighing and measuring out goods was imperceptible and varied somewhat according to the customer; his trips with the boat on Sundays were mostly mysterious, he came home at night bringing something or other with him, such as this eiderdown hidden under his armpit. In the course of years it amounted to a tidy lump of eiderdown, which could be put into a sack, but when loose was enough to fill a room. The English steamer might provide a market for it.

Oliver was not in too much of a hurry, his prudence imposed caution. Purely in fun and as though to try him he asked his learned son Frank what *ederdun* was called in English; and Frank just turned it up in a dictionary and found it; oh, it only took him a second! For the next few evenings when Oliver was free from the warehouse he went regularly down to the quay, showed himself there, talked to the Englishmen, went to work quietly. It leaked out of him that he had a little eiderdown—if that was any good? Well, it might be, said the mate, the second mate. So he had some eiderdown, how much?—"Oh, only a little, enough for a bed or so."—"Not enough for another bed as well?" asked the sailor standing by.—Well, there might be, Oliver had been buying small parcels for several years, he was sure there was enough for two beds or so—

They talked it over. Oliver wasn't exactly allowed to deal in eiderdown, he had no shop, but he could bring along a sample that night. So it was agreed.

The sample was fine, superlative, incomparable, a scrap of it escaped and floated to the skies; lying on eiderdown was like soaring on high, hovering in the air. A fresh agreement was made as to price and time of delivery, the gentlemen did not

haggle. They reckoned in pounds, but Oliver could not accept pounds, they would look too suspicious in his hands. All right, they considered the matter, he should have Norwegian money; if not before, then just as they were sailing, he could depend on that! Oliver had the generous heart of a sailor; besides, he liked the gentlemen and believed them; he would bring the down a bit at a time and they could settle at the finish. No fear at all about the payment, gentlemen!

They invited him to follow them into corners to keep him to themselves, gave him this and that to eat and were like brothers to him; this was something different from the crew of the *Fia,* who scarcely had eyes for a cripple. Oh, nobody was like the Englishmen; they took Oliver to their bosoms, chatted with him and asked him questions; he could answer with a Norwegian word here and there when he was stuck, they didn't mind, they'd be able to make it out. They had now seen pretty well all the people in town, but they hadn't seen the Postmaster; did that man simply sit day and night in the inner office hatching the money? The mate and the sailor were even interested in such irrelevant trifles as whether the Postmaster and his family lived over the office. Then they talked about Oliver's personal affairs: so he had a son who was a student? That was great. Oliver had a pretty wife, they knew, very nice figure, they had seen her on the quay; why didn't he bring her down to see them? They wouldn't eat her—

They offered him drinks, but Oliver's tastes were not in that line; on the other hand they had noticed that he was fond of food and they wheedled a few dainties out of the steward for him to eat on the sly. You never saw such gentlemen!

Then the ship finished discharging and Oliver brought down the last of the eiderdown. He only met the sailor this evening; it was blowing a gale and raining, the captain and first mate had gone to a farewell dinner at Consul Olsen's, the second mate had toothache and left his excuses, he wanted to walk himself

into a sweat along the country road in spite of the weather; the crew were ashore.

Everything was in order, Oliver should have the money this evening, Norwegian money; that was really what the second mate was after.

As they were alone on board there was no need to hide behind bulkheads or in corners; the sailor invited his guest to beefsteak and fried potatoes in the men's quarters. It was a memorable meal, Oliver's inside was in a golden haze of repletion and well-being. He caught sight of a chest and again a far-off memory came over him. He looked at the sailor and was on the point of shouting "Adolf."

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Xander," replied the sailor.

Silence.

"It's queer how like my old chest that one is," said Oliver.

The sailor answered unconcernedly: "Oh. It isn't mine. It belongs to one of the other men."

"Isn't it yours?"

"No. If you've finished I'll take your plate out. Come on, we'll go on deck."

"Just like my own sea chest. Same kind of handles, painted green, we'd cut tobacco on it, there's the mark—"

"Oh."

"What was it you said your name was?"

"Xander. Let's go on deck. They'll soon come aboard again."

They went up. It was blowing and raining, darkness was falling fast and the sky had an ugly look. They stood by the rail looking out, talked of the weather and shook their heads. The ship was cleared, the pilot had gone to the hotel to be in readiness, but it did not look as if they would sail before morning.

Something moved among the cases on the quay, a tarpaulin was raised and a head stuck out to listen—it was Olaus the grazier who had turned in for the night.

Oliver may have been actually a little fuddled still by his heavy meal; he asked all at once: "Where did you get it?"

The sailor didn't understand.

"The chest. I sold it to a boy called Adolf."

"The chest's not mine, I tell you!"

"No, excuse me, it's not yours, but—"

The sailor said: "If you're going home now, give us a look tomorrow morning. We shan't sail tonight."

It was now about eleven o'clock.

XXIII

OLIVER WENT homeward in a state of some confusion. Did it take no more to upset him and turn his head than a good meat meal and an old sea chest? Where was his advantage over the man under the tarpaulin, his wilier brain and his better gumption?

He met some of the crew of the Englishman going aboard again; they had come from the hotel and were tolerably merry, Oliver recognized the situation from of old.

Outside Chandler Olsen's house he saw some figures with umbrellas and lanterns; they were the gentlemen of the farewell party saying good-bye to one another and going home. The Double Consul was not among these, nor was Consul Heiberg, who was also rather high and mighty and did not visit the Chandler Olsens. Oliver saw Lawyer Fredriksen and heard his voice of thunder, he knew the two Englishmen, the captain and the mate, knew Consul Davidsen, the Postmaster, the Borough Surveyor, the Collector of Customs. That was the party. It occurred to him that he might do something to make sure of his money for the eiderdown if he found out exactly when the ship would sail, so he decided to follow the two seamen. Oliver's gumption had returned.

"Good-night, good-night!"

The Postmaster had no umbrella to lend, but asked among the group: "Can't I lend someone my lantern? I have such a little way to go. You, Captain?"

"No, thanks! God bless you."

The Postmaster shared Consul Davidsen's umbrella, as they were going the same way; he carried the lantern so that his companion had most of the light; they did not talk much in

the high wind and only of commonplace things. Davidsen, who was a small tradesman and Consul, had nevertheless noticed something this evening, and when they halted at his door he asked mysteriously: "Did you see how taken up the Lawyer was tonight?"

"Taken up?"

"With the lady, the daughter, what's her name?—Olsen's daughter, the elder one."

No, the Postmaster had not seen that.

"Perhaps it means something," thought Davidsen.

"Perhaps it does. He has nice children, Consul Olsen, nice girls, the one who married the painter and this one who is left, amiable ladies. I'm thinking of what you said just now—but what should it mean? She's so young and pretty, the Lawyer must be twice her age."

"They wouldn't be the first."

"That's true. Yes, we labour and are full of business and take to ourselves wives and contend and tire ourselves out, always assuming that we have long to live! I beg your pardon, you were going to say something?"

Small tradesman and Consul Davidsen had very little idea of saying anything, but perhaps he had made a movement, given a little start; no doubt he was afraid the Postmaster was going to begin another of his tiresome disquisitions, and so he replied: "I was only going to say that you can have my umbrella."

The Postmaster declined: No, thanks, it was only a few steps, he had an umbrella at home. What was he going to say?. Oh yes, as distinguished from the hare of the woods and the gull of the sea—

"Of course the Lawyer's only thinking about her dowry," said Davidsen hastily.

The Postmaster went on: "Oh, how eternally restless we human beings are night and day! We have no repose. The object of our strivings is not to get enough, but to get more than

enough. Our soul climbs up and tumbles down again, crawls on all fours, tries fresh ascents and tumbles down once more. Then one day we die. The English captain wanted to try and sail tonight; it's no weather for it, but he means to sail. He has to go and load at a port sixty miles from here, he wants to be ready to take in wood pulp at seven o'clock tomorrow morning. Then he'll cross the North Sea and try another ascent. By sailing tonight he will gain a day. Will he gain a day for life? No, no, he'll weary himself out, but he'll gain a day's profit. The beasts and the birds, they sleep tonight."

"Won't you take my umbrella?"

"No, thanks, it's scarcely raining now. Well, now I mustn't keep you any longer. The English captain talked about God—"

"Yes, he was religious, I heard. But now we must go to bed, Postmaster."

"Religious, yes. Perhaps I did not understand it all, for your Englishman has a religion of his own in this world and justifies it in an entirely English manner. He reduces one people after another to subjection, takes away their independence, castrates them and makes them fat and quiet. Then one day the Englishman says: Let us now be just according to the Scriptures! And so he gives the eunuchs something which he calls Self-government."

"It's just as you say. Well, good-night, Postmaster!"

"Good-night! Oh, are you going to bed? There was another thing, by the by. I wonder whether the English haven't their own God, an English God, just as they have their own monetary unit? How else can you explain their incessantly carrying on wars of conquest in all parts of the world and afterwards, when they have conquered, thinking they have done a good and noble deed? They invite all men to understand it in this way, they thank their English God for the success of their misdeed, they get religious over it. And now we witness the remarkable characteristic of the English that they assume that other people

will join in rejoicing at what they have done; *now* indeed mankind must turn good, they say, now let justice reign, let us all be religious! To other people it may seem so strange that the English never cast their eyes down; they must surely have their own God whom they have satisfied and who has given them dispensation. They write in their papers that now the moment has arrived, now mankind is to turn and be different, they make a program of it: Come now, let us set ourselves to being religious, they say; what else is there for us to do? Oh, what a change ought now to take place in mankind, everything must be different from what it has been: there must be different pictures on our walls, different books on our shelves, different sermons in our churches, we must have a different society, different furniture, different science, a different love, a different piety —in short, a different pair of shoes altogether. Why? Because the English themselves are different? The English will never be different. Because a sudden change has come over human nature? Human nature only changes with immense slowness and in the course of many, many lives upon earth—"

The Postmaster looked up; there was nobody with him, Davidsen had disappeared. Davidsen must have stood there as long as he could bear it, and then made his escape. It was not the first time a man had escaped from this orator, his congregation was in the habit of deserting him. A congregation prefers the gospel it expects. The Postmaster preached the unexpected, he was one against the congregation.

The Postmaster walked home with bowed head; the back door was open as usual and he entered the passage. Something moved against the farther wall; he raised the lantern and saw a man.

A man. A stranger, a man in the thirties, an unknown with a thin, dark beard; he wore a waterproof coat with a leather belt round the waist.

They stared at each other for a few seconds, equally sur-

prised at the meeting; then the man hit upon the device of looking at an umbrella that hung on the wall; he looked at the Postmaster again and then back at the umbrella. He seemed in a quite pitiable state of confusion. That umbrella—he somehow didn't remember when he had hung it there.

Didn't the Postmaster help him at all? How?—the Postmaster couldn't even help himself, he had collapsed with his back to the wall, and there he stood holding the lantern aloft. But then the stranger took down the umbrella and began to explain himself in a desperate kind of way; it sounded odd and uncanny—was he raving or drunk? He spoke in English, the words were there, but the man was mad; now he was trying to open the umbrella and talking to it: "Dentist!" he said. "I should think so! Who can tell me the end of this? Understand?"

The Postmaster was stiff and white as a corpse. To begin with his face had brightened for a moment, as though he knew the man and would speak to him; then he checked himself and considered; he must have discovered his mistake, and he grew stiff.

Didn't he know the language? Of course he did, he had been stammering English with the captain and mate earlier in the evening. Had he nothing to say? Or was it too much? As the stranger was slipping away to the door the Postmaster murmured: "Wait a moment!"

"Dentist!" said the man. "Can't you understand anything? I'm mad with toothache. Isn't this where he lives? I saw a brass plate—"

The Postmaster murmured: "I had a son—"

"It's not me," answered the man, trying to pass.

"Where do you come from?"

"Go away!" ordered the man.

The Postmaster said with downcast eyes: "Had you that umbrella when you came in?"

The man seemed to reflect: "Hadn't I? Well—"

But all at once the Postmaster remembered the door of the inner office, where the registered mail was, the most important of all; the door was now unlocked, it stood ajar. The Postmaster hastened in and a moment later a groan was heard.

On reaching the back yard the stranger stopped abruptly, paused for an instant and then turned back. He entered the passage again and hung the umbrella in its place. He glanced through the door of the office and saw the Postmaster inside. He was lying back in his chair. The lantern stood beside him, still burning.

Then the stranger regained the street and started to run. It was blowing and raining. Oliver was coming up from the quay and saw this man flying past him. Why, it's the second mate! he thought; it must be a pretty bad toothache he's got! "Hullo there!" he cried, thinking to remind him of his money. The man only ran the faster.

What?—this made Oliver suspicious. Besides, why should the second mate be flying about the country now? At high tide to-night the wind would probably change and the storm abate; then his boat would sail, didn't he know that?. Oliver called after him again, but in vain. Then he set off in earnest after the second mate along the country road, and it was incredible what jumps he made with his crutch. Oliver could more than hold his own when anything was at stake; and now his money was at stake.

He overhauled the runner and saw him stop, heard him give a kind of signal—it was just where the open ground came to an end and the road turned sharply into the wood, plunged right into the wood; very well, it was from there the signal was heard. And Oliver heard a signal in reply. It's no weather for running after women, thought Oliver; there must be something else up, and what is it? He hopped along to the first trees and posted himself in hiding.

He saw a couple of figures come out into the road to meet the second mate, where all three stood with their heads together. It was very mysterious, very extraordinary. As they were to windward he might easily have heard the sound of their voices, but he heard nothing; either they did not speak or they were whispering. They were like three ghosts, they moved, perhaps they looked at each other, they went through some transaction, but said nothing. Oliver thought it all very uncanny, he would have liked to get away but for the business that brought him.

Time wore on, it was now past midnight and high tide, the wind had dropped, and all of a sudden there was disturbance and hurry in the group, the ghosts came towards him, Oliver could even hear that they were talking. There were two of them besides the second mate: a woman and a man with a long beard. When they came abreast of him Oliver hopped out into the road. He was met with an exclamation from the group. The second mate seemed to want to hurry on, but Oliver spoke to him and asked for his money. "Come aboard!" answered the second mate. But instantly he changed his mind, thrust his hand impatiently into his waterproof and hauled out money, notes, lots of them; as it was dark the man with the long beard struck matches to give him light.

Then three short blasts of a siren were heard from sea, it was the Englishman recalling the crew. The second mate broke into a run.

Strangely enough, at that moment Oliver thought less of his money than of the company he was in. Of course he didn't lose his head, he put his money carefully away in his pocket, but having done so he was greatly astonished at the woman of the party. "Are you out on a night like this?" he said to her, calling her by her name.

"Yes," she replied in a flurry.

Oh, she had felt safe enough in the dark, but a match had betrayed her, and now she wavered and answered Yes under pressure.

What came next? Oliver was Oliver. His brain must have gone to work, the situation was so absolutely right for a man like him: the darkness of night, the mystery of all this money in a waterproof, the hole-and-corner meeting, and lastly the woman —yes, it was she, Blacksmith Carlsen's daughter, the widow who kept house for her father. As far as that went Oliver had never heard any ill of her before; but perhaps she took after her sister and her brother the tramp, Blacksmith Carlsen was unfortunate in his children. What was his daughter up to this evening?

"I saw you," said Oliver.

To this he was given no answer. And if Oliver had thoughts of gaining some advantage by finding out a secret about her this evening, he was going to be disappointed.

"What have you been doing here?" he asked.

The long-bearded man interposed: "We've been singing duets. What were you doing here yourself?"

"I? You saw that. I got my money."

"Your money, yes. Wasn't it for eiderdown?"

"Oh, you know that?"

"Yes, I know that."

Oliver turned to the widow: "Who are you keeping company with? Is that your sweetheart?"

"Supposing it was!" answered the man in a very unmistakable manner, taking a pace forward.

Oliver gave way and said: "I only wanted to hear where you came from. I don't know you, do I? Or do I know you?"

"Where I come from? Pretty near the same place you get your eiderdown from, ha ha."

Then Oliver saw that he wouldn't get anything out of him and became like a lamb: "I haven't any bird rocks. I've just

bought up this down all over the place in the last twenty years, I may say. No, worse luck, I'm not a man to own bird rocks, I'm a cripple, as you see."

The long-bearded man must have been very sure of himself, or he pretended to be; he took not a scrap more notice of Oliver, but turned to the widow and chatted with her unconcernedly: "It couldn't have gone off better, could it? and now it's stopped raining. He'll catch his boat all right."

"Yes."

"They can't leave him behind and sail short of a mate. No, it couldn't have gone a bit better. He'd have been aboard now if he hadn't been held up counting out that money. Did you ever hear the like?—eiderdown, stolen goods! But it couldn't have gone better. Are you cold?"

"No."

"You mustn't be so downhearted, what's the matter with you? He's sailed and we're here, that's all. A stout fellow!"

"He had awful bad toothache this evening," said Oliver to ingratiate himself.

The man took no notice of him and went on: "But it was filthy weather for us having to meet him here in all innocence. Why wouldn't you take his raincoat when he offered it you?"

"I didn't want to have it."

"No, you didn't want to have it. But anyhow it was innocently meant on his part."

"I don't want to accept anything from him," she said.

Silence. Suddenly the man said with a laugh: "Isn't he your sweetheart? What nonsense are you talking?"

"Be quiet!"

"I don't see any harm in your meeting your sweetheart! But as far as that goes neither of us has anything to worry about, we were innocently walking along and met him. That's all there is to it! But are we going to stand here all night?"

"If I had known all—!" she said.

Here the long-bearded man did a gay and unexpected thing, he took a mouth organ out of his pocket and began to play a tune. Perhaps he did it to cheer her up, he may also have done it to emphasize his own unconcern, to emphasize the innocence of his presence here on the road tonight. It was incredible that he should play now, but there was no mistake about it, Oliver heard the music with his own ears. And in another attempt to ingratiate himself and make friends with the man Oliver cried: "That's grand, blessed if it isn't!" He bent forward to the widow and remarked: "I've been all over the world in my day, but anything like this playing—!"

The man stopped, turned to Oliver and asked: "What are you waiting for?"

The cripple saw that he was plainly not beloved by this man and answered accordingly: "No, I'm not waiting for anything. I believe I'll go down and see the boat off."

The man resumed his playing.

Oh, but here he made a mistake, he was too audacious, his playing at once roused Oliver's suspicions. Of course, he knew this tramp now he came to think; he had memories of his playing from when he was a boy; besides, he remembered the legend of this musician, a fellow-townsman, Blacksmith Carlsen's son, the mouth organ artist, the vagabond who was to be found wherever roads or railways were being made. What was he after now? He had his sister with him, his brother Adolf was aboard the Englishman, the one with the sea chest—oh, a band of brothers and sisters of the same kidney. It annoyed Oliver that he had not had the chance of letting them know to their faces what he knew about them.

He went homeward in deep rumination. This was a big knot to unravel and who could tell if he had anything to gain by worrying about it any more? The second mate was quite unknown to him, and maybe he was the most important person of all. Besides, Oliver had his own affair to hug himself with:

a pocket bulging with money, the reward of his assiduous visits to the bird rocks year after year.

He was almost home when the Englishman blew a long blast on his siren and put off from the quay.

Altogether an eventful evening, almost to be compared with the memorable day when he came in from sea with the derelict. And Oliver would have had no objection to cutting something of a well-merited dash on entering his own house; here he was, you see, the man who could do things, the top-sawyer with a devil of a brain; here he came with money and secret knowledge. But there was nothing to be done, the house was asleep, Petra was asleep. Not that she was generally in his confidence, that wasn't his idea at all; but at a moment like this he was rather overloaded with mystery and might have given her a hint or two that she could puzzle herself green in the face over. But Petra was asleep. She must have been tired, poor wretch, it was one of the evenings she had had to go to Lawyer Fredriksen for further negotiations about the house; she had not been home so very long, just time enough to fall into a sweet sleep.

Oliver woke her by purposely dropping his crutch on the floor. And with a thought of his own importance at this moment he said in a tone of displeasure: "You might have had something warm for me when I come back after an important affair; I'm wet through."

Petra had doubtless had enough of his bragging and boasting of important affairs and answered irritably: "Something warm? I didn't find anything warm when I came home."

"Oh, you've been out, have you?"

"Didn't I have to go to the Lawyer again?"

"Are you never going to be finished with that Lawyer?" he exclaimed angrily.

No answer.

"And what in the Lord's name have you two got to jaw about

all this time? Week after week goes by and there's no end to it. Hell to it, I say! But now he can wait till he gets me riled one day and then I'll chuck the money in his face. You don't believe it? It's all one to me what you believe, but you don't know me properly; I'm not so short as you and he think I am, that I'm not—"

No answer.

It didn't go at all. But all the same Oliver would have another try, a little more friendly this time: "Well well, now the Englishman's sailed," he said by way of beginning.

Petra was asleep.

No, the moment was completely spoilt, its greatness and solemnity reduced to nothing. Pleasant to come home to your family with a fortune in your pockets and be received like this!

He pulled off his wet clothes, unstrapped his wooden leg and lay down beside his wife—two islands in the bed. He could think of nothing else to do. There was no weakness in her, she breathed heavily and calmly, her body was in repose. It was dark and he could not see her, but she had a comfortable smell and was warm; she obligingly lay on her side to give him room. The adventures of the night continued to occupy Oliver, the hours went by, and when there was just enough daylight to see by he hauled out his roll of notes and counted them again, surreptitously, with his back to the bed.

In the morning he would not utter a single hint to Petra from sheer resentment; a woman who slept away an opportunity of hearing great news deserved nothing better. But he gained nothing by it, for what should happen but that Petra herself was able to announce an unheard-of event in town: she came straight from the pump and told him before she had time to put down her pail that the post office had been robbed in the night and that the Postmaster had been found on some steps at the other end of the town. He was sitting there without a hat, he was out of his wits.

At any other time Oliver would have instantly seized his crutch and hopped into the town, but his annoyance with Petra for having cheated him out of his triumph the night before restrained him. Nor would he allow that he was a bit astonished at this tale of hers, this cock-and-bull story of hers; far from it, he finished eating his breakfast and tormented Petra delightfully by not questioning her. How furious she was getting! She seemed to have promised herself not to pour him out more coffee although his cup was empty, let him look after himself! At last she said: "What?—have you lost your tongue since yesterday?"

"Lost my tongue?" he replied in surprise.

"Well, do as you please!"

"What should I talk about?" he asked. "What is it you mean?"

"Oh, then you didn't hear what I told you?"

"That—that bosh! I know a lot more than that!"

She flung her eyes upon him, struck by an idea: "Why, you haven't been going and messing yourself up in it, have you?"

This was charming; here he sat, innocent as a babe, with clean hands, and to be suspected like this! He gave a little dignified cough and said: "Perhaps you'll have a care of your jaw!"

"I only asked. No harm meant."

"Well, you have a care of your jaw!" he repeated, getting up.

Sure enough Petra was indignant at his slighting her great news, her colossal news, but as he had the crutch within reach she judged it safer to go than to stay; she gave a toss of the head and went into the old parlour to give Grandmamma the news.

Oliver finished his meal and left home. As the town was completely distracted by the event of a few hours before there was nothing doing at the warehouse and Oliver had the best of op-

portunities for thinking things over. It was a stroke of luck that he had not been able to reveal anything the night before, a real God's providence; from sheer self-importance Petra would have run round with every word of it and got him mixed up in the post office robbery, perhaps too his money for the down would have been in danger, in spite of his innocence. The thing now was to use caution, no free expenditure for the present, no clothes that looked too good, no finery at all; so the pink necktie in the haberdasher's window was not to adorn his person.

Oliver thought it all out carefully. There could be no doubt he had some of the stolen money in his pocket, but he hadn't stolen it, God was his witness. Blacksmith Carlsen's children might possibly throw some light on the affair if they were reported to the police, but Oliver had no intention of reporting them, he should think not indeed! There were many reasons against it; in the first place Abel was apprenticed to the Blacksmith and the widow gave him his board. And was not Blacksmith Carlsen himself his master? Oliver had too much fatherly feeling to bring ruin on his son. Besides which, the Blacksmith's children might easily be innocent, nobody could tell; perhaps the one who knew most about the affair was the foreign second mate, and who was there that knew him?

Ah, that second mate and that Adolf with the sea chest, perhaps they were the worst of criminals! Hadn't they even asked Oliver to bring his wife aboard the Englishman, they wouldn't eat her! But luckily Oliver didn't bring Petra with him and expose her to God knows what, he was not the kind to take his wife to anybody. And now it appeared that his sense of propriety had guided him aright, she might have found herself in a regular nest of criminals—

The town hummed with sensation, the paper had an article which must have been written by a man who had command of language, Policeman Carlsen was here, there and everywhere with his investigations, the Postmaster could not be got to make

any clear statement, he was overwhelmed and sat staring at the floor in his depression. He began by giving some sort of a description of a strange man he had come upon in the passage of the post office about twelve o'clock at night: the man was old, with a long grey beard, perhaps he wore a mask; he spoke English. On a later examination the Postmaster altered his statement: perhaps the stranger was not old, but on the contrary young; he would not have been able to overpower him. The man had no umbrella. In short, the Postmaster talked wildly and confused everybody, he had gone silly, had had a stroke; the Doctor saw him and diagnosed softening of the brain and imbecility. To think of it, a man who had been able to design towers and houses with porticos!

And the town hummed. Nobody could say that the people did not help Policeman Carlsen and the authorities in their investigation; for the first few days they devoted themselves entirely to it and neglected all else. So that in the midst of the turmoil another piece of news was almost entirely swamped, and one that might well have deserved attention, namely that Consul C. A. Johnsen had received the Cross of the Danish Order of Knighthood. Who was there that paid any attention to this honour, who mentioned it? A couple of lines in the paper, a chance congratulation from the few townspeople who remembered it. No, the one who really valued the distinction was Fru Consul Johnsen, she telegraphed it both to Scheldrup, who had now arrived at New Orleans, and to Fia, who was in Paris.

XXIV

IN THE big cities it is assumed that folks in the small towns hardly ever have a great event to bless themselves with; this is an erroneous and insulting habit of thought, they certainly have their failures, frauds, murders and scandals just as well as the great world. It is true that the local paper does not issue special editions about them, but a piece of news spreads rapidly and surely from the pumps and reaches the most humble dwelling. Was there anyone in the whole coast town that did not hear of the post office robbery early next morning? Unless it was the Chandler Olsens, for they were people who took it easy and often breakfasted in bed.

And just as little as the small towns lack sensations do they lack variety therein; small-townspeople have every requisite diversity of events. You think perhaps they would be reduced to live and die on a mail robbery? In that case the novelty of this celebrated affair would have had to wear off less rapidly. The Doctor kept it alive as long as he could, because in a way it showed him triumphing over a broken Postmaster, but it was not so very long before people got sick of discussing it.

Then what was the end? There was no end, things never moved at all. The old or young man who spoke English and perhaps wore a mask, but at any rate had no umbrella, this presumptive criminal was not to be found. Telegrams were sent after the English ship, but she had already finished loading in Norway and had sailed for some home port. Telegrams were sent there too, and when the ship arrived some sort of examination was held, but it led to nothing. Of course it came to light that Adolf was Adolf, a blacksmith's son, a Norwegian seaman, but he was married and settled in England and on board a British

vessel was pretty well protected by the British flag. Besides, his captain was religious.

The second mate also turned out to be a Norwegian, son of the postmaster in a small town the name of which was given, unmarried, with excellent testimonials as to character; no suspicion rested on him—and surely the father must have recognized his own son in the stranger at the post office, if it were he; which he had not done. Moreover there was this again about the British flag: that the British flag would not have protected a criminal for a moment, the whole world knew that. The second mate and Adolf were therefore for the time being in British service under a religious British captain, and there could be no question of any extradition.

Why had not these two men visited their parents while their ship lay discharging at their native place? Well, you see, that was one of the more delicate questions put to them, but to this again they had a satisfactory answer: they did not like to present themselves to father, mother, brothers and sisters with empty hands, and as yet they had not succeeded in saving anything to speak of from their wages. That was the reason. But God knew—deposed the second mate—that he had been ashore many an evening and hovered around his home, looked up at the windows, trembled when he heard a door open, clasped his hands when he saw the shadow of his mother on the blind. This was touching, the court itself was touched, and it means a good deal when a court is touched.

A peculiar thing came out with regard to the seaman Adolf: when his clothes and his person were searched it came to light that he was densely and lewdly tattooed all over his body. It was an amazingly filthy sight, and when questioned as to where he had had it done he replied: "In Japan." These pictures damaged Adolf severely in the eyes of the bench, but they were no evidence of a mail robbery. The second mate had no tattoo marks and was particularly clean and nice about the body, so he came

out of it much better, in fact this was to the advantage of both the suspects.

No, nothing more came of the mail robbery; nor was it indeed any very vast sum the thief or thieves had got away with: some seven or eight thousand crowns of registered mail. If therefore the proceeds were divided among several there was not a very big share for each. One was tempted to say: "Much good may it do them!"

The affair was no longer a great one, Policeman Carlsen showed little zeal in his investigation, as indeed might have been expected, since his own nephew had been caused unpleasantness, which had even reflected on himself. But Policeman Carlsen's superiors were not very keen either on carrying the thing to extremes: it was senseless to raise trouble with England over a trifle; besides which, there was a general desire in the town to be lenient to Blacksmith Carlsen, a man who deserved better children than he had.

But what about the Postmaster? He had taken the catastrophe so much to heart that nobody recognized him, a bent and broken figure with restless eyes and muttering lips. This man so jealous of his honour had not been able to bear the disgrace and injury that had fallen upon his office; for of course he had nothing else to grieve over, since his son had done no wrong. The Postmaster was the object of general pity. True, during his whole residence in the town he had bored the life out of reasonable people by his everlasting religiousness and his metaphysical twaddle at all times and places, but now that fate had struck him down they were far more apt to remember the virtues than the blemishes of this afflicted soul. Was it not he who had designed the big school, that pillared house which travellers could behold even from the sea and would remember to the day of their death? And there he was now with a clouded mind, of less account than a child.

"He is defunct and his wits are darkened," said the Doctor.

"I saw it coming on latterly; there was a queer look in his eyes, he had grown fragile and only wanted a trifling reverse to make him succumb. His faith has brought him down."

In contrast to all the rest the Doctor found it difficult to forget the mail robbery; he even persisted in his suspicion that the money had sailed away in the English ship. What was to prevent the second mate with his local knowledge from letting himself into his home and stealing the registered mail? Offspring! the Postmaster was always saying. Alas, one's offspring was capable of anything! Offspring Adolf was another of the same kidney, the terrible pictures he carried on his body were a mighty witness to his character. Truly those two fathers might rejoice in their offspring!

The Doctor positively could not stop triumphing. Never had he trodden the sandy streets of the town with less effort than now, and never had the correctness of his view of life been so clearly established. He called pretty often on that religious and credulous wreck the Postmaster, looked at him for a while and then left him; he could detect no signs of a relapse into light and lucidity in his patient and therefore deduced permanent obscurity. Was it not *human thought* this childish mouth had always boasted of in his harangues? That human thought never came to an end, that human thought was the light that was never extinguished? It had been at any rate in his case, and left a black wick! Weak heads like his should never indulge in cogitations of their own, they should design school-houses and churches and stick to their catechism.

The Doctor perhaps had nothing to pride himself on or exult over, but he felt satisfaction in his own way. His materialism proved right, the case of the Postmaster being struck imbecile strengthened the Doctor's position among his fellow-men—it was as though he had brought about the disaster, no one came near him in authority, his decision had to stand. When he said of the Postmaster that his faith had brought him down, some-

one or other might ask: "His faith?" And the Doctor answered: "Why yes, his superstition!" And that had to stand.

But golden joys were as far as ever from the Doctor, life was and continued to be infamous. But for the enjoyment of now and then being able to annoy a fellow-creature it would have been unbearable. Do you think, for instance, that he had gained anything by changing his tradesman? He had broken off his long-standing connection with Consul Johnsen and given his custom to Consul Davidsen, and incidentally he had not done this in order to damage Davidsen, but on the contrary to give his little store a lift. What was the result? His action was but poorly appreciated, Davidsen too sent in his bill. They were all alike, Davidsen was only another Consul. And to make matters worse Consul Davidsen was not even a man the Doctor could get a proper talk with; he never said anything in reply but only pretended to be overwhelmed, the wily little devil, and smilingly allowed himself to be grossly derided.

So after all the Double Consul was better, though he too was only a tradesman and shipowner.

Rumour had it that there was great sport when the Doctor came to congratulate the Double Consul on his Danish decoration. He had got the Druggist to join him in this visit, and they had been very obsequious. They had entered the Consulate by way of the shop, which was not their usual habit, and they sent in their cards by one of the counter-jumpers, after which they deposited hats, sticks and goloshes and tidied hair and beard with a pocket comb. Both gentlemen had gloves on.

The Consul appeared in the doorway in some surprise, with their cards in his hand, and asked jokingly if they desired an audience. To this they bowed. "Very well, pray come in!" said the Consul, still treating it lightly.

But when they came into the office and kept up their solemnity in tendering their congratulations, the Consul himself must have begun to think it right and proper that they should behave

with such ceremony; perhaps this was the correct manner of offering congratulations on a decoration, how did he know? True, he made some show of demurring and said: "Well, we need not stick to formalities!" But no, they were steadfast and refused to be inveigled into a lighter tone.

The Consul offered the gentlemen cigars; they rose, bowed, and each took his cigar, but did not light it. Then the Consul tried to make himself agreeable and talked of the mail robbery, which had just taken place; the gentlemen bowed at all he said and attributed great importance to his words. So far all was going well, Consul Johnsen was elaborately polite, as the greatest man in the town he could not ignore good tone. One of the shop-boys came in and delivered the mail into the Consul's own hands; the Consul flung it over to his desk without so much as casting an eye on it. Right-hand man Berntsen entered and asked a question; the Consul replied over his shoulder: "Presently! I'm engaged now."

While this went on the gentlemen sat still as mice; it looked as if they were waiting for a further exhibition of good form. But as there did not seem to be any more coming, the devil must have got hold of the Doctor; he wanted some more tangible form of satisfaction. So he turned to the Druggist and said something; out of respect for the Knight his voice was low, but he said: "I believe we ought to have left our shoes outside as well."

Then the Consul saw it all; perhaps his inside contracted in a grimace, but there was nothing to be seen in his countenance as he answered the Doctor: "Probably you were afraid you had holes in your socks."

Wasn't that Consul Johnsen all over! His reply told, for an instant the Doctor felt miserable, as he smiled and said: "I dare say, it's quite possible!" But a moment later he caught on and added: "Though, by the way, I've paid for the socks and all the rest of the things I've had from this shop."

"Yes?" queried the Consul.

"I've kept the receipt."

"Indeed?" As the Doctor said nothing the Consul proceeded: "What then? I don't see what you're driving at."

"I'm not driving at anything," replied the Doctor. "That was all."

Here no doubt the Consul should have stopped and not gone any further, but he was probably hurt at being made a fool of and could not help being rather superior: "I really know so little about your and other people's small dealings in the shop, it is Berntsen who looks after that. I sit inside here and occupy myself with more important things."

"Yes, there is no doubt of that!" the Druggist then hastened to admit; he was losing his courage and wanted to put things right.

But the Doctor only sneered: "Naturally!" he said. "We are great men, we sit here and dispose of a little cargo-boat, one in number, we don't stand ourselves at the counter and sell soft soap and thimbles!" Here the Doctor drew his breath through his teeth, giving an impression that he was feeling cold—or perhaps rather that he was furious.

The Consul replied: "It is precisely as you represent it to be, I do not interfere in minor matters."

"How great are we after all?" exclaimed the Doctor. "Good Lord, how great are we, you and I?"

The Druggist interposed: "No, this was not what we meant. Excuse me if I don't see the matter in this light; what's come over you, Doctor?"

The Doctor rose to his feet: "No, look here, Mr. Apothecary-soul, Mr. ——"

"Hush! The fact is, Consul, we wanted to come here today in order to—we thought, the Doctor and I, that as good acquaintances we were at liberty to make a little joke of—well, of course it didn't occur to us to make fun of you personally,

but we thought we could chaff a little about the Order, the decoration, which I am sure neither you nor we think so very much of. Perhaps we have gone about it in the wrong way, but we thought it might amuse you as well as us."

"And you thought right," replied the Consul. "As you saw, I joined in the joke from the very first moment."

"Do you take all this trouble to explain an obvious thing like that? I'm surprised at you!" exclaimed the Doctor. "Come along, We'll go now. Adieu!"

Well, then the Druggist got up, but he let the Doctor go first, while he began explaining things over again to the Consul and used the most polite words he could think of. He hoped this wouldn't cause any ill feeling between good acquaintances; the Doctor went too far, that was ridiculous about taking off his shoes, and when one had to order about a big steamship from one of the world's ports to another, from Genoa one day to Zürich the next—it was a work that almost passed human comprehension—

"Zürich is not a seaport," said the Consul with a tolerant smile.

"Oh, isn't it? Unfortunately I don't understand much about shipping, all I know is that I get pills from Zürich. But what was I going to say?—in any case it's a gigantic work to sit here as director of ships all over the ocean and at the same time carry on the biggest retail business in the town. The Doctor and I might well have taken our shoes off outside as far as that goes, I say that straight out; but if I know you rightly, you wouldn't have liked it. Perhaps the Doctor acted foolishly enough without that, and I will ask the Consul to overlook the whole thing."

"I've already forgotten it, pray don't talk like that; the idea of my taking offence at the Doctor! I really have something else to do," replied the good-natured Consul Johnsen. "Let's say no more about it!"

"But to come back to the decoration, you are the first Knight in the town, and I'm sure there's no one who grudges you this well-deserved honour. I expect it's an acknowledgement of the brilliant way you dealt with that derelict some twenty years ago?"

The Consul smiled: "Ah, some few little things may have happened since that time."

"Of course. Lots of important things, particularly your valuable reports. Now I suppose the other Government will follow suit—wasn't it Bolivia?"

"How do you mean? I'm not Consul for Bolivia."

"I beg your pardon!"

"It must be Olsen or Heiberg who is Consul for Bolivia."

"Oh. But then aren't you Double—"

"—Consul? Yes," replied Consul Johnsen, laughing heartily at the other's embarrassment. "Yes, of course, Double Consul, ha ha ha! But really it must be one of the others who is Double Consul for Bolivia, ha ha ha."

"Oh yes, it was Holland I was thinking of," said the Druggist, crushed; "how very unfortunate. In any case, your cross of knighthood is an honour, not only to yourself, but to our whole town, we are all honoured by it. And no doubt the Dutch Government will also reward you before long."

"How so? No, there's no particular reason for that. Won't you light your cigar before you go? Well, as you please!"

"Now they must feel pretty ashamed of themselves!" was probably the Consul's thought when the two gentlemen had left. And certainly another thought of his was that in any case the Doctor gained nothing by this silly visit. Possibly the gentlemen themselves thought differently, God knows; perhaps the Druggist left the house chuckling inwardly, and when he told the Doctor of his last words in the Double Consulate perhaps both gentlemen chuckled together. Oh, that about directing ships over all the oceans of the world—why, it was common knowledge that

Consul Johnsen did not follow all the movements of the cargo boat *Fia* and that it was chiefly his son Scheldrup who had the management of her.

Still the Doctor did not seem satisfied; he said: "When all's said and done he never saw that we were getting at him. I expect he's trying on his Danish cross at this moment."

The Druggist thought he had seen.

"Seen? What does he see? Did you say 'gigantic work'?"

"I said 'gigantic work'."

"And Bolivia and Zürich? But he didn't throw you out!"

"He's a little slow of comprehension. But he'll see the whole thing in the end."

"Not a bit of it. No, our idea missed fire."

The Doctor went to Chandler Olsen's. He often went there, almost daily of late; he had a patient. The painter son-in-law was there on a summer holiday with his wife and child. There was nothing the matter with the child, but the young mother, like all young mothers, was anxious and wanted medical advice.

The Doctor had no objection to calling at Chandler Olsen's, it meant an extra good fee; in fact, he was beginning to acquire a taste for it. There was nothing grand or formal about this house, nor was there any parsimony either; all was abundance and affluence, a little extravagant, a little wasteful. On entering the hall you might find ladies' odd gloves lying about, or broken umbrellas that had cost money. The rooms themselves showed no disorder, but rather too much money to spend, on picture frames, on carpets, on chair-covers; the curtains hung right down to the floor and trailed on it. No, there was nothing niggardly here, but the fittings and furniture suggested a self-made fortune, new money.

What of it? the Doctor thought as he drank the expensive wines and smoked the good cigars; here was kindliness at least, and hospitality, coupled with the greatest readiness to recognize

his gifts. He sat comfortably on the sofa and all hung on his lips; what then if the money was new! Money is money, a million is no worse than a thousand. And there the Doctor sat. He was not a man who could ever allow himself to be overawed, but there was no doubt he cut a rather poor figure in these surroundings, his dicky creaked against his chest in an irritating way and he had to keep pushing back his cuffs, or they would have slipped down over his knuckles.

"No, there's nothing the matter with the child today either," he said. "All she wants is a few more teeth to complete her likeness to her handsome mother."

The young wife replied with a deep blush: "Oh, I'm so glad! We were so afraid about her again. But the funny thing is that it was not me that was most afraid."

Consul Olsen asked: "Who was it then?"

"You, Papa. Oh yes, you must confess!"

The Consul excused himself: "I was not afraid, but I thought it was no use letting her suffer if we could help it. She's called after me, Doctor."

"That explains a great deal!" said the Doctor.

Here the Doctor was a different man, he did not have to be on his guard and always giving pin-pricks, they respected him without that. He put on a friendly and protective air, he positively made himself at home; in the assurance that he was their superior he did not make the gulf between himself and these people too deep. Morover, in this house good humour reigned; it did not taste bad for a change, the Doctor was not pampered with it at home; here he found health and laughter, combined, of course, with a certain childish gentility.

People were always coming and going here. Besides the son-in-law and his family they had a visit from the other artist, the house painter's son; they had brought him along. He had not married into the family like his friend, but he was welcome

too; they gave him an attic with a carpet and curtains down to the floor.

And now this painter's son wanted to paint the Doctor's portrait.

"What do you want that for?" asked the Doctor in good faith. "I can't buy it, and you won't be able to sell it."

"I want to paint you for the sake of your face," replied the artist. "Payment no consideration!" he added gaily. Ah, this painter's son, was not such a bad young man, he could say a smart thing at times, he was inflammable and still in love, he had an honest face too, but his hands were big and coarse; the Doctor looked at those hands with disapproval.

"Well, paint away!" said the Doctor, affecting unconcern.

"Thanks. But I wanted to paint you in your study, surrounded with medicine bottles and fat books, occupied with your science."

The Doctor actually gave a start. A remarkable artist this, such understanding of a learned person and his profession! The Doctor was evidently touched, a slight flush spread over his thin cheeks and he emptied his glass to conceal it.

Yes, he was at his ease here at Chandler Olsen's.

Perhaps at first he had not expected much of it. He had wished to ennoble this house as he had ennobled other houses, Henriksen's of the Shipyard, Heiberg's, Davidsen's shop, Johnsen's of the Wharfside; now he had come to feel comfortable here, as long as it might last. In addition to this he had another idea: he might deliberately set aside Johnsen's for a while in favour of Consul Olsen's—now then, see how you like that! He proposed to bring some balance into things, to create a powerful force beyond the pale; oh, he could rule the town with his dissensions, with two parties, two cocks of the walk!

This might have worked quite well, but everything came to grief through the good-natured stolidity of the Olsen family.

No, the Olsen family was not apt to learn and had no sense for intrigues and dodges. They understood food and money and showy furniture, but they had no culture, no illustrated papers or plates painted by the daughters of the house. The Olsen family kept to the earth.

"Johnsen of the Wharfside has been made a knight," said the Doctor. "Now it's your turn."

Chandler Olsen gave a melancholy shake of the head and answered: "No such luck!"

"It's not beyond you. It only takes a little working."

Chandler Olsen gave another melancholy shake of the head and answered: "I am Consular Agent for a country that hasn't any Orders."

"Ah. But now look here, Consul: you could at any rate have a country house."

"A country house? Oh yes. I could."

"Of course! Why should there be only one country house here? And why should he have it? You're certainly a richer man than he."

Chandler Olsen shook his head with a smile: "No, you mustn't exaggerate now!"

"A country house, then. And you'll drive out to it with a pair of horses."

"A pair of horses? No."

"You can afford it."

"Yes, I can that," replied the Consul with a swagger. "But a pair—no, you must excuse me. I can't even drive one horse."

"You'll have a coachman for that. Why, good Lord, you're a man who knows how things ought to be done. A coachman with shiny buttons and gold on his cap."

"No, no, no, the coachman would split himself laughing at me," declared Chandler Olsen. "And I can't be seen sitting behind a pair of horses."

The Doctor proposed: "I'll keep you company the first few times; that is, Fru Olsen and I will. Won't we, Fru Olsen?"

Fru Olsen was struck all of a heap: "I? Lord love you, no! Your wife could, Doctor, your wife could—"

Nothing to be done.

XXV

WELL, THEN everything went on as usual again—only the Postmaster was broken for good and all. He had been dismissed with a bare pension, had moved to a little house near the Shipyard and a new postmaster took possession of the post office.

Summer was past and gone and the two tasselled caps went back to their studies. They were not exactly bosom friends, but they travelled by the same boat. Bosom friends? Why, Frank had been plugging all through his vacation and had stolen a fresh march on Reinert; was that likely to lead to pleasant and harmonious relations? Oh, how Frank had studied all these weeks! He showed it too. He had managed to weave into his consciousness so much difficult knowledge of languages, little by little, without force, without violence, simply by devoting time and vitality to it; and now he stood there on deck rather skinny and yellow, without density in any direction, and thus beautifully adapted for learning still more. To the actual life around him he gave more attention than it was worth, for hands he had no use; he regarded the activities of the crew with a listless eye, the engine-room staff were terribly greasy. Frank could not stow casks and cases in the hold, no, he was not for that; but he could look out words in dictionaries, he was the possessor of tenuous and sacred values in philology; no comparison was possible. Refinement is won by scholarly industry and lost by labour.

On board the boat he met a little acquaintance of his school-days, the Drawing-pin; he popped up from the stokehold like a pale nigger, only half clad, with sweaty face and shirt thrown open on his chest. "Good day!" he said and nodded.

"Good day?" replied Frank, trying to recall the nigger. "Are you here?"

"Yes. Didn't you know?"

"No," replied Frank, rather distantly.

"I'm a fireman. How's young Abel getting on—well?"

"Abel? Yes, as far as I know."

The Drawing-pin tried to refresh his memories of school: do you remember this? have you forgotten that? He laughed and showed his white teeth, with never a thought that he was dirty; he stood right in the draught and didn't notice it. Frank moved twice and three times and said: "There's such a draught here!"

"Are you all well at home, your sisters too?"

"Yes, as far as I've heard."

"Ha ha ha, it sounds just as if you hadn't come straight from home," said the Drawing-pin. "And it's so queer that you didn't know I was here. Your sisters know that."

Frank drew back: "I have so many other things to think about."

"But you remember the time we smashed the window? When the Headmaster caught us?"

Frank receded farther and farther, almost to the horizon: "No, it's so long ago."

The Drawing-pin guessed that his friend was a learned man and tried asking about himself: "You're going back to the University?"

"Yes, naturally."

"Well, I'm blowed! how far have you got? I suppose you'll soon be a parson?"

"A parson?" grimaced Frank. "Oh no!"

"Oh."

"I'm studying languages."

"I see, all kinds of languages. Well, that's no trifle either. All kinds of tongues, like the Headmaster. I suppose young Reinert's going to be a parson?"

"I don't know."

"Eh, you don't know?"

"No, I don't know what he's going to be," said Frank reluctantly.

"I saw Reinert come aboard this morning, but he didn't seem to know me."

"No, that's quite likely. You're so sooty."

"Well, but I nodded to him," said the Drawing-pin, as he set about hoisting cinders from the stokehold and heaving them overboard.

"What a dust you're making!" said Frank.

No, Reinert only knew those he wanted to know; he scarcely knew Frank who was his colleague and had even stolen a march on him. Frank saw next to nothing of him on board; he travelled second class and preferred to stroll over to the first. But there stood Frank on his third class deck with the consciousness that he knew more languages.

Reinert had done no work to speak of in the vacation; he had read over a little to please his father the parish clerk, but he had spent most of his time out of doors. Reinert had been by no means idle, he had made a complete conquest of Little Lydia and the Henriksen girls, and young as he was he had even made great progress with Heiberg's Alice. It was a wonder how well the boy looked with his curly hair and his nice clothes, and on top of that he was so dauntless and enterprising that he might well have passed for a grown man. He carried it so far that he was well on the way to eclipsing the Magistrate's Deputy with the ladies, though here he had to do with a man who had passed all his examinations.

Frank strolled about the deck, blue with cold, trying to find sheltered places as the ship turned. The first thing he would do when he got to Christiania was to buy an overcoat with a velvet collar.

He passed the smoking room; the door was hooked wide open, he glanced in and stopped. Then he bowed and would have passed on, but he had stayed a little too long; besides, he was in full

view of acquaintances, Lawyer Fredriksen from his own town, a great man, but not too great to converse with a lesser one, with Reinert; the Lawyer was paring his nails with a mother-of-pearl knife, both were smoking.

Frank did not go in, but he had no reason to slink away either; he was sufficiently known and acknowledged, and so he spoke to Reinert through the doorway: "I met the Drawing-pin on board here, he asked after you."

Reinert did not answer, but blinked his eyes and seemed to be lost in thought.

"He's a fireman here."

"Oh," said Reinert absently.

"Who is the Drawing-pin?" asked Lawyer Fredriksen, as though he did not know.

"A schoolfellow of ours," replied Reinert. "Yes, I'm looking forward to seeing *Les Cloches de Corneville* again."

"I haven't seen it."

"Klausen's great. Everybody says so."

"I have so little time for theatres and circuses," thundered Lawyer Fredriksen. "You see, I have my work in the Storthing, and besides that I'm Chairman of a Parliamentary Commission—"

Frank saw there was no place for him here and drifted off. For that matter he was entitled to find a warm corner and smile to himself: he knew more languages than both of them put together; Fredriksen could not have more than a smattering of German left—smatterings of everything!

What then, could not Lawyer Fredriksen smile just as well? it was with his languages as with his anatomy: he knew all he needed to know. Now he was on his way back to his Commission, well rested up and ready to start again where he had left off. These meetings of the Commission were no bad thing, the papers noted his presence; he could draw fresh travelling and subsistence allowances from the Treasury; he met his colleagues and equals

for toddy and a long pipe in the evening. It gave him prestige, a little provincial paper had even mentioned him among several others as a future cabinet minister: Had we no men? There was Counsel Fredriksen of the High Court! It did Lawyer Fredriksen no harm to be pointed out, he gained something by it, gained a little; oh, he had a future before him, even now he was a man who could take out his pocket knife in the middle of a conversation and start digging at his nails.

Well, then these three fellow-townsmen sailed away to Christiania, Frank, Reinert and the Lawyer, each with his object, his ambition, his future. The Drawing-pin stoked the boilers.

And they left the coast town behind them.

They left a blank, each in his way; Frank's was perhaps the easiest to bear. His little room was left empty, but Grandmamma no longer had to go on tiptoe and could rattle the rings of the cooking-stove as much as she liked. This was no small change for the better. Abel inherited his brother's little room, but that made no difference one way or the other, he was only there at night; and besides, Abel was no scholar.

No, the Lawyer undoubtedly left deeper traces on his departure. Not that his office suffered particularly by his absence, his business was not so extensive that he couldn't have it sent him by mail and deal with it on his desk in the Storthing. But besides that the Lawyer now had a certain provisional understanding; Fröken Olsen missed him perhaps, she must in any case have found it quiet without his voice. What was to come of it at all? Just wait, the time had not yet arrived, but it was approaching; a provincial paper had named the coming men, among them the man of the provisional understanding. Fröken Olsen must surely miss a heavy step on the stairs, the appearance of a puffing gentleman, a neck with folds of flesh, an awkward hand: "Good evening, good evening!" If she had any memory she must also recall the cigar ends in the ash-tray, the chat, the practical way of discussing love and Norwegian politics: "What after all is the

object of our efforts in this life? To be comfortably off, what else? We rise continually from one position to another and are better and better off, have good food, good clothes, put money by, grow rich, own house property in town and shares of ships in the port, live in a country house, sail when we like and drive when we like. We touch nothing that is not in our line, we don't aspire to be egregious, we leave that to others, every man to his taste! Later on—later on we can start undertakings and provide people with work, we can also do good round about us, lend a helping hand. We hear of a homeless family and allow them to live in one of our houses: Here you are, come and live here, you and yours! We hear of misfortunes and show our sympathy, we are far from hard-hearted; sailors are maimed in their dangerous occupation, we take up the question and see that they get their rights. In this way we make for solidarity, we aim at progress and democracy, only let us combine it with service, the flag and the fatherland—"

By this time Fröken Olsen would probably utter a "Yes."

"Don't you agree? that is the way it goes and that is the way it ought to go! But then, you see, it is not good for a man to be alone, he needs a helpmate both in his private and in his public capacity, Fröken Olsen—"

"Won't you light another cigar?"

"Thanks. A helpmate, I was saying. She is necessary for several reasons: his house must have a mistress, she must see to the furnishing and upkeep of the rooms, the housekeeping purchases are her affair. Someone comes to see the husband; he is busy, he is at a cabinet meeting, but his wife takes his place. The committee of a home for the aged or of an asylum for idiots desires her valuable support; very well, the wife signs an appeal. Oh, she is raised to a higher plane now, to new honours, but at the same time to new duties. She cannot always excuse herself, the public has its eye on her, society has its claims. Could you satisfy these claims, Fröken Olsen?"

"I?" Fröken Olsen would say with a laugh. "Well, I don't

know. Yes, I suppose I could if I had to. What do you think?"

"I take it for granted. And now the only other question is whether you are willing. Some months have passed since our first understanding, you have had time to think it over again and again. But I myself am waiting for certain developments, so there is no hurry, I can give you more time yet."

Then no doubt Fröken Olsen would ask in some surprise: "Our first understanding, you say; what understanding?"

"Our provisional understanding, to be sure. Don't you remember at your sister's wedding? I thought we agreed—"

"We didn't disagree anyhow."

"You see!"

"But it was *your* understanding."

"Well, we won't quarrel about that; it was I who did most of the talking, you're right there. I gave you my promise—"

This is only affectation on her part, Lawyer Fredriksen must have thought. But for safety's sake he would like to mention something, hint at something that had occurred to him. These artists and painters who had found their way into the house might turn the girl against him; it was incredible that such a thing should happen, but still he would hint at it: "So then I laid my offer at your feet and there it lies. Hm. Who is that singing so upstairs?"

"It's the painters. They have a studio in the attic."

The Lawyer smiled: "Ah yes, these happy-go-lucky young fellows, careless souls, singing and painting on canvas! I say nothing of the other, but your brother-in-law at all events comes from a refined home, his father and I were at the University together. How is the boy getting on? A young man like that has nothing to fall back upon, he has learnt nothing solid, has never studied. The other I won't even mention, but your brother-in-law was born with good chances. Well, it may turn out all right, he may sell a picture now and then, I'll buy one of him myself later on and I'll leave it to you to choose it."

"What—!"

"I will," nodded Herr Fredriksen, as though from a height above. "Buy a picture and ask you to choose it. Will you do that?"

"Would you dare trust me?"

"I dare trust you with far more important things, of course. And talking of paintings, we'll buy not one, but two of him. We will so. And now I'm going back to Christiania in the service of my country. Let our understanding rest for the present; when the time comes I hope we shall be of one mind—"

So that was how matters stood with the provisional understanding. It had practically been a single-handed affair of the Lawyer's! You see, he had made this arrangement some months ago, and done so to his own satisfaction, but today it had occurred to him that he would rather not be so single-handed in the understanding, he would like to bring the other party into it. Naturally Fröken Olsen agreed, he had only to ask her. It turned out as we have seen, she put on a few little airs, but that did not mean anything; the end of the whole thing was that she would buy pictures for their house.

So Lawyer Fredriksen went on board the boat.

But now Fröken Olsen was left behind to think in solitude. How much had she promised this man? Nothing. Not a blessed thing. But had she refused him point-blank from the very first moment? Some women refuse nobody, not one; even the most impossible man can be used to think about. Fröken Olsen was certainly not one of the sordid, the designing ones, but she had this man hanging on, had him in reserve; one was better than none, she was getting on in years, her sister was married—God knows, a future is a future, a Minister is a good deal of a person, when he becomes a Minister. Oh, at any rate one could think about it! But sordid? She was not immersed to the eyes in scheming; she was a natural girl like all the rest, Nature herself directed her policy. She had never lacked anything, was it

likely she should lack an admirer? She had abundance of all else, and now she had a Cabinet Minister, when he became one! There was nothing incomprehensible in this; a hen among the flower-beds is not incomprehensible either.

Of course Fröken Olsen was bound to miss the Lawyer when he left.

Did others miss him? The house of Oliver? It is not likely. Oliver himself must have been more than glad when his urgent creditor left town again and Petra must have been tired of perpetually running up to the Lawyer's house. At last her negotiations had come to an end. She could not possibly have learnt to like this man who worried her so, there was no question of an attachment, what next! Were there rumours of a miracle and a remorseless love, did they say at the pump that both were aflame, was there mention of the word short-circuit? The lawyer owned the roof over Petra's head, she talked to the man in order to keep that roof, that was all. True, she had to go and talk pretty often about the matter, and Oliver, her husband, may sometimes have grumbled that she was never done with it; but did she dress herself drastically and incitingly for these visits otherwise than by putting on a new chemise under her dress? Not that Oliver knew. She had got these new chemises and she seemed to like being in them. Petra was a married woman, no man's advances would have any effect on her. Many years ago, while she was still young, she had boxed Scheldrup Johnsen's ears for the sake of a word; what would she do now that she was getting grey about the ears and had children almost grown up!

Oliver had no grounds for suspicion. He said: "Well, so he's gone?"

"Yes," replied Petra. "And I'd be glad if he never came back!"

"How's that—do you think he's gone for good?"

"I don't know. I'd be glad if he stayed away!"

Oliver looked at his wife and saw she meant it; she made a

grimace of disgust and spat to one side. She could not have spoken more plainly, she loathed the Lawyer.

"Yes, he's no godly man," she said. "But lawyers—when did you ever see them different?"

"And this I will say," Petra went on; "that next time you can go to him yourself. I'll not stir a foot any more."

Could anyone speak more plainly? Oliver did not take it amiss, on the contrary, and next time he would take a turn up to Lawyer Fredriksen's, he said, a short and sharp turn, he said and nodded. And he intended to settle accounts with him once for all, he'd tell him his name, Oliver Andersen, and demand a receipt for a certain pile of money that he'd fling down on the bloodsucker's table. The cripple and coward gave an exhibition of how he would set about it.

To tell the truth, Oliver had really grown bolder of late; the consciousness that he had money in his pocket brought about a rehabilitation in the man, his character was on the mend. During the first few days after the mail robbery he was still uncertain and asked Petra to sew an inner pocket on to his waistcoat. Petra laughed at him and thought he was showing off. "A strong pocket!" said Oliver. "Oh yes, a sail-cloth pocket!" said Petra. So Oliver had to go to his mother to get the job done.

And now that he had his inner pocket and his roll of notes in it Oliver felt safe; nobody would think of searching a cripple who had done no wrong. The money for the eiderdown was his.

It vexed him that this money could not properly be produced in the light of day. It would have gladdened Oliver's heart to be able to walk into the shops of the town and order this and that, and then pull his whole bank out of his pocket to pay; this pleasure was denied him, the money had to be spent with a certain furtiveness. One good thing was that it was mostly in small notes; at cautious intervals he might take a note out of the bunch and

exchange it for goods. In this way he had kept himself in sweets to suck daily, besides a little finery, a new necktie and a starched collar; for the little girls he had bought shoes with ribbons. Nobody suspected him of wild expenditure; a couple of bigger notes lay unbroached in his inside pocket.

This worked quite well, Oliver's needs were not great, he was easily satisfied. Nobody could call him a glutton, though he was rather sweet-toothed. Petra was the very opposite, a covetous and grasping woman. Now more than ever Oliver had occasion for his new and better character, he had to be continually making excuses for Petra and often gently reprimanding her. The devil could make her out, she had grown crosser and more intractable than ever, it seemed to have come over her suddenly; neither the food nor the drink was good enough for her now, she couldn't stomach either one or the other, the last coffee tasted downright rotten; what kind of coffee do you call this you're bringing me? she said. She had seen a piece of Gruyère cheese in Davidsen's shop, and if she had still been parlourmaid at Consul Johnsen's she would have had cheese like that! Over and above, she'd seen a piece of golden soap in Barber Holte's window, and it must have a good smell, that soap!

But Oliver, with money in his inside pocket, was able to answer her: "Now don't be so greedy for everything you see, Petra! What you ought to think about is how much you and I earn. If it comes to that, we're not badly off."

At this Petra gave evidence of her ungovernable petulance and began to wrangle with her husband. Instead of being afraid of the crutch, which lay within reach, she sneered at it and its owner, saying she lived with a crutch and talked to a crutch and slept with a crutch and would have to die with a crutch, what a life! And as she said it she spat to one side again, just as if she was going to be sick.

Oliver with his heavy chest and shoulders might have got up and cleft the table with an axe or hurled away the stove or per-

formed some other feat as a slight admonition, but he did something altogether unexpected, he went into the town and came back with the cheese and the cake of soap and said, Here you are! What a thing to happen! For a moment Petra was struck dumb by the incomprehensibility of it, then she took to tears: she wouldn't have the things, she'd have nothing to do with them! To think he could be such a fool as to get into debt for such footling things! Take them back!

"No, now you've got what you asked for," said he.

Asked for? Wasn't she to be allowed to joke occasionally? Or did he want her to be dumb for life on top of all the rest? Foh!

Now it must have hurt Oliver's feelings that she treated him just as she had treated the Lawyer, with expectoration; but he said nothing about it. Oh, a great change came over a man when he acquired a new character! Oliver prevailed upon his wife to taste the cheese, and sure enough she tasted it and spat it out. What was this? It was a different cheese, don't come trying any tricks on her! Petra turned pale with irascibility and administered a sharp reproof to the little girls for smiling. When she smelt the soap she had to hold her nose.

It was impossible to please her.

Not that either Oliver or the little girls had any objection to keeping the luxuries for themselves.

So the days went by, with good and evil, quarrels, little incidents, sometimes with a grand meal of fish when Oliver rowed out one evening, sometimes with cakes for the coffee when Oliver had changed a note. Things didn't go badly at all, the family's lot was more tolerable than that of most of the humbler class in town. How many others had a permanent job and money in an inside pocket!

There was for instance the unfortunate Postmaster and his family who were worse off. The Doctor was still unable to discover any improvement in his afflicted patient; he sat where he was put, in mute depression, more dead than alive. Nor could it

be assumed that he enjoyed any inward satisfaction, that he chuckled and laughed to himself over anything, or slapped his knee with merriment. Far from it. He showed no sign of consoling himself with his old philosophy, with his fondness for children, his delight in the idea that they were going to be so much more than he was, that, thank God, they were already preparing for a better life on earth next time. The Postmaster appeared to have given up thinking, given up seeking, given up believing. He had searched for many a long year and at last had found a path on which there was a little light and followed it—until, far along that path, Fate rose against him, erect and terrible, and stopped him. His meditations had swept him away.

His wife and daughters were capable women; one daughter was now to have a place in Consul Johnsen's shop, his son, who was an agriculturist, helped him as far as he could and the bare pension went almost farther than was expected, but so many grown-up people could not live on it. The outlook would have been black if the son in England, the smart second mate, had not stepped in. When he heard of the mail robbery and his father's misfortune he came to his aid like a man. In a splendid letter he exhorted his parents and sisters to trust in God in their trial; he told them that he too had suffered on account of the affair and had been suspected and examined before the magistrates, but that of course his character had been cleared. He forgave the world for having suspected and accused him; God be praised, justice had triumphed, in England justice always triumphs. Finally he made known to them that this must be regarded as a call to the town to repentance and self-examination; such an unheard-of event did not concern him and his family alone, but all the people. In short, he was religious. What a son! He never said a word about the most important thing of all, but this was that in some sudden way he must have found himself better off, whether his pay had been raised or he had found a new coal mine in the soil of England—he sent home a good lump of money and promised more later.

This was sheer salvation, his generous action brought unexpected happiness to his mother and sisters. They went to the master of the house and told him the news; and they had agreed to break it rather suddenly in order to give a shock to his dulled brain, they hoped the joy of it might restore his intellect at a stroke, fancy if it did! But it didn't, they were disappointed. The Postmaster listened to them, seemed even to take great pains to understand this cackling one against the other, but he made nothing of it. It was just as though he had heard the news before or had thought of it himself; the only change that could be seen in his face was that perhaps it turned a little paler. His wife burst into tears.

"No," said the Doctor; "your son the second mate can't cure your husband."

The Postmaster's wife was not a woman of many words, but the Doctor's continued cocksureness hurt her and made her ask: "Why not?"

"Ah, why not!" replied the Doctor. "I am more inclined to believe that in the end the Postmaster himself will get tired of sitting and looking at his navel."

Such language in the face of a stricken family, nay, in the face of God! But it was one of the Doctor's usual decisions. It had to stand.

The Doctor went home to his surgery. In these days he was sitting to the painter, for which reason he wore his ageing frock-coat and the striped trousers he had had made for Fia Johnsen's confirmation. That was an eternity ago.

He passed Johnsen's Double Consulate, and as he kept a vigilant eye on this establishment he soon discovered that it had hung out another new sign: *Millinery. Blouses. Knitted Goods. Hats trimmed.*—The sign must have been put up over the door since last night.

The Doctor stopped and read it over carefully, and so as not to be talking entirely to himself he nodded to a little girl who

curtsied in passing and said: "Our Knight has a fondness for new escutcheons!"

Just so, Consul Johnsen had cleared the extension of his premises, where the stoves and a couple of harrows had stood year after year, and turned it into a millinery establishment. Simply that.

The Doctor walked on smiling, arrived at his own front door and came upon the painter who was waiting for him. "A discovery, young man!" he shouted a long way off; "something new!" Whereupon he began to discourse.

In the ordinary way the Doctor did not carry on conversations with a house-painter's son, but with this young man it was a different matter, an artist and no insignificant person, miserably wanting in book-learning, but with sense enough to listen to words of erudition. And during the sittings the whole town had to go through it, from the unfortunate Postmaster to the Johnsens of the Wharfside and the Chandler Olsens, from Davidsen and Heiberg to Lawyer Fredriksen and the cripple Oliver—the one with all the brown-eyed brood in his house. The painter was given much entertaining information about the town's affairs; the Doctor was both witty and malicious, oh, the Doctor was by no means an unpractised archer, but sometimes he wanted to be too smart and his arrows fell quivering just beside the mark. For even a Doctor could make a bad shot.

"Young man, you're a stranger here," he might say; "the whole town is a den, a hole, but for me it would be a morass. I give folks something to take!" So they sat there in the little provincial surgery and the painter painted and the Doctor let his tongue wag on. The room had no very professional appearance, though this was what the painter aimed at and the portrait was to be called "The Physician." The Doctor had pulled out some books and stuck up some medicine bottles, a stethoscope stood on the table and an alphabet hung on the wall to test people's sight for glasses, perhaps there was a cup in the corner with a little sub-

limate in it; that was all. Where was the operating table and where was the glass shelf with all manner of instruments on it? The two chairs in the room were kitchen chairs. There was no microscope, no skeleton, no, not even a skull in token of a medical man's firm courage in dealing with the dead.

Within this framework the Doctor was painted. They were agreeable sittings, only interrupted now and then by some man with a swollen finger or a newly-married woman with a significant toothache. The Doctor was a capital model, full of life, full of nonsense, bitterness, scepticism and combativeness; his face was constantly changing, the only thing stable about it was an air of unshakable superiority. Oh, how he used to make it obvious to the young man that the town was a den and a hole!

Now he came upon him here by his own front door and didn't even give himself time to go inside before beginning about his new discovery: "Young man, it's not only Lawyer Fredriksen who combines profit with patriotism!" How he shot off his arrows, hitting and missing by turns! Johnsen of the Wharfside had opened a millinery business overnight. For the matter of that it must be the work of right-hand man Berntsen, he was a man of great ability, he made so little out of stoves and harrows and took so long selling them; no, let's have fashions! Not that it didn't fit in well with all the rest of the business; Johnsen of the Wharfside supplied all the housekeepers' daily wants, and now he would sell the servant girls their finery as well. Millinery! And who was to take charge of the new department? Why, the broken-down Postmaster had two daughters, the elder one was to take it over. It was a stroke of luck for Johnsen of the Wharfside that the Postmaster had come to grief and that one of his daughters had to go out and make her living. She was a capable girl and a nice girl, but now she was to step down from her little house by the Shipyard and go and manage a millinery department. She hadn't learnt the business, but that didn't matter, there was not much to learn; Johnsen got her cheap, in fact there

was a show of charity in giving her work. "Young man, this town's a hole—"

The mill was started, the painter couldn't get in a word. At long last the Doctor said: "Well, now let's go in and paint!"

"I'd rather cut it out today," said the painter.

"What, cut it out? Very well. Have you something else to do?"

The painter answered: "I don't seem in the mood somehow."

"Oh? Well, just as you like. Good morning!"

But as he watched the painter's departure the Doctor had some suspicion of his disinclination; there was the young man, carrying his box of colours as usual, wasn't he perhaps going somewhere else?

Just so, the painter was going somewhere else. He had been sent for by Fru Consul Johnsen to come and put in the Danish cross on the portrait he had painted of her husband a few years back. Oh, those Consuls and those Consul's wives of the coast town! Anyhow, she had explained the matter in the little note she sent to the painter: the portrait was an excellent one as it was, wrote Fru Consul Johnsen, but Fia had just come back from Paris and she thought a little touch of colour would improve it. And Pasteur was painted with the Legion of Honour on his black coat.

XXVI

AUTUMN and winter came and the days grew short. It was cosy in a way to stand in the forge and have a roof over your head and hammer red-hot iron that shone and gave you light, and there was plenty to eat and drink in the Blacksmith's house; yes indeed, many another one was worse off than Abel. And he himself thought it was all right. Why, for one thing you could do your work without having to wear a cap or gloves. A big leather apron was his most important garment.

Blacksmith Carlsen had greatly fallen away in the last few months and spoke more and more dejectedly of his loss of strength, hinted at giving up the smithy, murmured about death: Death may enter in or pass us by till next time, but we must all die! This autumn had been hard on him, had thinned his hair and turned it white, his thoughts were now few and unworldly, he took long rests while Abel was at work. Naturally the mail robbery must have made an impression on him; his brother Policeman Carlsen had not been able to resist telling him of the enquiry in England and how Adolf was covered with beastly tattooings. The old Blacksmith answered: "It's not our Adolf."—Policeman Carlsen went on: "And just think, he lay here all that time the boat was discharging and never came near you once!"—"Oh yes," replied the Blacksmith, "I'm sure he met his sister, if he was here; I kind of remember that. Both the boys see their sister, what should they come and see me for? You mustn't do them an injustice."—"Then Adolf did come here?" asked Policeman Carlsen.—"No," replied the Blacksmith.

Empty talk; there was no common sense in it. However, Blacksmith Carlsen took it differently from the Postmaster, he was a simple, untaught man, his view of things was more governed by

habit; he thought, not in hysterics, but in terms of his craft; a blacksmith, he belonged to his class. It is a good thing to belong to one's class, otherwise one becomes an upstart and gets one's originality frittered away. And was not the Blacksmith a father? He knew far more good than evil of Adolf and did not despair. For only a few years ago the boy was pattering about here in the smithy and asking questions and hammering little bits of iron and hitting himself on the fingers and crying and being comforted; wasn't that so? That Adolf in England must be quite a different Adolf—and even he must have hit himself on the fingers, he was perhaps still young. "The world's made up of decent people, excepting the scoundrels," the Blacksmith would say. But in any case he had had to give up the idea of seeing either of his sons succeed him at the smithy, so who was to take his place?

He said to Abel: "In a year's time you'll have learnt more than I knew when I started for myself."

Did he mean something by this utterance, or was it merely praise and appreciation? At any rate it sent a ray of golden light into Abel's soul, he instantly thought of Little Lydia and the future! Extraordinary boy! He was as you saw him, straightforward and strong, grimy, full of life, with no nonsense about him; he had developed a powerful chest and though his hairy hands hadn't much finish about them, they were as strong as you like. He had clamped his own shoes all round with iron, and to those who were judges of shoe-soles Abel's were something out of the common.

When he went home in the evening he looked up his father and explained the situation. Oliver—though for several weeks he had been musing profoundly about something that had befallen the home—set aside his own thoughts and listened to his son with attention. "He must mean that you're the one who's to take over and downright manage the forge!" he said.

"Ah," said Abel.

"I don't consider it impossible. What do you think yourself?"

"I don't know."

His father nodded his head as though the matter was settled and declared: "I can't make anything else of it!"

Yes, Oliver was the children's friend, they came to him with their doubts and their troubles, he had the right kind of sympathy, he was made for a father who let his children bring themselves up. Abel, that impossible madcap, had hinted once upon a time at marrying and setting up house; he had his reasons for it, it would never be right till he got her, he said. Well, the father had not laughed at him even then; on the contrary, he had nodded: it was not such a bad idea, not at all, in some ways, and he was not altogether surprised. For when in a little while Abel was the town blacksmith and a craftsman and big and broad-shouldered, he could do pretty nearly anything he chose, so to speak. All he wanted was a little time to look round and see about a cooking-stove and a place to live in and so on, but a couple of years would soon be gone, he'd see!—Abel objected that he couldn't possibly stand two years more.—"No, no, I can quite believe you," replied his father, yielding.—Abel went on: "Because every vacation that Reinert comes home and does for my chances."—"Reinert!" snorted his father with a scorn which was a powerful consolation to Abel; "a youngster, he's not more than eighteen or so, is he?"—Abel, who was not much over sixteen, hastened to say: "I'm not more than eighteen either."—"Ah, but it's different with you, you're a craftsman and a skilled man, when you've done your apprenticeship you can be a master any day you like. That's what I say: is there anything in the world that goes quicker than a year or two? Just look how they get married one after the other, and no more than bricklayer's labourers some of them. But what are you?"—Probably what Oliver meant by all this talk was that time would help the wild boy to get over his fancies.

Today again he encouraged his son and propounded his view of the matter in many well-intentioned phrases: Blacksmith Carl-

sen would set Abel over all the smithy—as Pharaoh set Joseph over all the land of Egypt. "I tell you, Abel," he said, "that the way you've shown yourself capable in your trade, and the way you've performed all he's put you to and God has appointed, he can't mean anything else."

No, Abel thought the same.

"You will be set over all his goods; we'll go home and tell your sisters, it's a big thing. A year is less than anybody thinks; what is a year? It's only that God blinks his eyes just once, and then it's a year. And if you manage a thing it's just the same as if you owned it. There's a mighty difference between a good Manager and a bad Manager, and when you see me managing the Consul's stores and his big warehouse it's just the same—"

Twaddle and claptrap, heroics and sentiment. But then his father said: "There's good stuff in you boys, both you and Frank! Now if you'll stay for coffee I've got some cakes here," he said, intending to make a little feast. "It's Saturday night and you won't have to go to the smithy tomorrow."

Ah, but Abel was engaged and in a hurry, he changed his clothes in a jiffy and went out again. He was like a fisherman who had a bite, he hauled up his line. This Reinert had been here again for an age in the summer and spoilt his life for him, now he was gone, but even since then Little Lydia had not been as she ought, Abel had parted from her many an evening with a heavy heart. This evening he went to her a great deal more buoyantly.

He found her at home and got her out; she must have seen by his look that something had happened.

At first he gave her his hand, and as she hesitated in some surprise, he took hers by force.

But Little Lydia, ever since she had begun to work for Consul Johnsen's new millinery establishment, making chemises and blouses, was never without a needle in her hand and several more in the front of her dress; she was not to be approached.

"Oh, I pricked you, I see," she said, unmoved.

Yes, that seemed to be just as plain to him as it was to her, he made a sour face and sucked the blood.

This little incident was perhaps not so unfortunate after all, it checked him, without it he might have said the most impossible things right away.

"Have you something to say to me?" she asked.

"In the first place," he said, "I'm to take over the smithy one of these days!" And thereupon he came out with it all and exaggerated a good deal and brushed aside a number of questions Little Lydia put to him. Oh yes, he was a skilled man, he'd be out of his apprenticeship this year just as well as next and could do what he liked. His father had advised him to see about a cooking-stove and a place to live in.—"It's nothing to laugh at, standing there like a goose!" he said, hurt.

"No," she said to humour him. But was he quite right in the head? he'd just been confirmed, hadn't he? or *was* he confirmed?

"I won't even answer you," he replied.

But, goodness, how he hesitated over it! And her mamma laughed at him every time she saw him. How old was he?

"Three and twenty years and three months," he replied, looking as if he believed in his own precision.

Then Little Lydia laughed aloud and asked again: "How old, did you say? Preserve me from you, Abel!"

"You're only making fun!" he exclaimed indignantly. "How old are you yourself? You don't think about that."

Little Lydia had no more desire to be little than he, indeed she had not, she liked to pass for a dressmaker and had gone into long skirts some time ago. "I?" she said; "how old am I? What do you ask that for? I'm not going to stand here and listen to you any longer."

Abel changed his tone: "No, you'll only listen to that Reinert. But there's going to be an end of that. I can't believe you care for Reinert, Little Lydia!"

"I? Mamma says he's a stylish gentleman."

"No, he's a muff!" cried Abel with unreasonable excitement; "next time he comes here I'll pick him up with my nails. Do you get that?"

"Now I must go in," she said.

"With these nails!" he cried, throwing up his two fists. "I'm game for that, you just see!"

It must have dawned on her that he was worried, and when he went on to declare that he must have her and couldn't wait any longer, she humoured him and replied that No, she didn't suppose he could. He continued to talk and his voice sounded strange, it trembled, he meant every word, and finally she answered in earnest, rather too grown up for her age: "Well, but I can't say that I love you!"

He smiled incredulously: "Oh yes," he said. And then he spoke again: perhaps they would be able to live upstairs at the Blacksmith's, there was a room there, painted blue, with dandy shelves, the Blacksmith had surely meant that he was to take over that too, what else could he have meant by it all! And there Abel intended to hide her, there should be no more goings on with that youngster in the vacation, he said, with that muff, that knickerbocker miss, he said. It would be a different kind of life! Abel settled a good many things of this sort and had much to say in their favour.

Little Lydia took it more sensibly than he, it appeared; she nodded when he spoke of the room, and on his declaring that he would stop all her goings on for the future, she seemed to think it hard, but perhaps natural that he should do so; at any rate she raised no objection. But little by little as she listened to his talk her eyes slowly closed, it was as though she lost sight of her own eyes, and suddenly she turned and went in.

Went in and stayed there!

He waited for a while; all his life he had to put up with a certain lack of correctness in Little Lydia's treatment of him and

this disappearance was no worse than many other instances. What about the time she poured hot coffee over his hands to take the hairs off? Or when she got the floor rag and tried to wipe away a black mark under his eyes, though the black mark was under the skin and came from sorrow?

As he was just about to take his departure Little Lydia opened a crack of the door and peeped out. Evidently she couldn't resist it any longer.

"I see you," he said; "you might come out again!" Then he unbuttoned his jacket and thrust out his stomach; in fact he availed himself of this unworthy dodge in the full consciousness that she might observe his watch-chain—which had no watch attached.

When she came out again she asked innocently: "Oh, are you still here?"

"Yes," he replied coolly; "I was waiting for you."

She made a pretext of fetching some wood from the shed; it was a cunning idea, he couldn't talk to her when she was busy with a wheelbarrow. So he said in a reckless tone and with a motion towards the watch-chain: "Ay ay, as you please, Little Lydia, I'll come back in half an hour then."

Actually he can't have had much more to discuss with her, but that was not the point; he just wanted to be where she was, what else? He took this turn down to the quay and then came back, now he would go in and see Little Lydia again. If he behaved in a friendly and inoffensive way she wouldn't mind another chat, and it would do him good.

And whether it was thought out beforehand or a lucky chance —he found her in the parlour quite alone; her parents had gone to bed and her sisters were out, as it was Saturday night. Little Lydia was sewing and excessively industrious.

Naturally he must have seen at once that her lips were uncommonly sweet, but out of politeness and not to take a liberty he would not kiss her just yet, in fact he would avoid any one-sided

action to his own exclusive advantage. "We didn't seem to be very good friends just now," he said.

Oh yes, as far as she knew they were. "How's that? But don't go messing with those white ribbons, Abel!"

If that was still to be the tone he wouldn't do much good this evening either, and as she had more pins than ever in the front of her dress she must have fenced herself about on purpose. Was it surprising then that he was angry and annoyed when she cautioned him about the white ribbons? "Now you're not to be like that!" he retorted. "I've handled velvet and the finest materials before now. But you're right, my fingers have no business there," he added, withdrawing his hands.

Even if she had no great predilection for him, she ought to have been moved at this and thrown her arms about him with tears in her eyes; but no, not a sign of affection.

He had long thought of getting the measurement of her ring finger, but it would have to be done casually as it were; he wanted this measurement for a certain purpose and that was really why he was fingering that bit of tape. "You have such thin little fingers," he said; "I believe your ring finger's no thicker than that—let me see."

If he meant that her fingers were still child's fingers, then this was an insult: "No, let me be!" she said. "I haven't time!"

Would it be assault and battery now if he simply took and kissed her for giving herself these airs? She certainly looked so discouraging that she might take it as an injury, but all the same he jumped up and did it, kissed her, defied all the pins and needles and kissed her a good while. She yielded, murmuring in between: "You're mad! Stop it! What do you want?" but she yielded all right. Oh, Little Lydia and he had done the same before, it was not the first time.

Afterwards, though, it was a bit awkward; he tried to pass it off with a laugh, but didn't succeed very well. She quickly put her

hair straight and tidied her collar which was twisted round, he had rumpled her a good deal; after that she was mute, and it seemed to be a regular business for her to start sewing again. It was pretty bad, he must have done her quite a serious injury; she was offended, she was, and seemed to regret the waste, not only of these last kisses, but of all the others.

There sat Little Lydia, surrounded by dress materials, lace, sewing silk, buttons and ribbons, and she had put out both her sisters' fine needlework to make a show; her own work was mostly linings. And now all these preparations had made no impression on Abel, he didn't realize at all what it was to be a dressmaker.

"I simply won't have you kissing me any more!" she said all at once.

"You don't say?"

"No, never!"

"What's that, was I kissing you? You don't mean it!" Oh, but his boldness didn't help him at all, he must have seen himself that appearances were against him. And now he had nothing to fall back on but the old topic that had sent her to sleep before: he assured her again that she was to marry him and no one else and that he wouldn't let her out in the vacation.

"Be quiet!" she said.

"I'm going the first thing to-morrow to see after a cooking-stove," he decided. "That Johnsen of the Wharfside has thrown out a couple of stoves, I'll go and get one of them and I'll easily get rid of the rust. That's so, I'll do it the first thing to-morrow."

"Yes, you just dare!" she threatened back.

They squabbled over this for a while and Little Lydia was the sensible one and got the upper hand: "I wonder you aren't ashamed to say such things!" she said.

"All right, I can wait a few days," Abel suggested, conceding as much as he could.

"A few days!" she replied pityingly.

"Well, shan't I have a use for it some day?" he asked warmly. "If that's what you mean I'd like to hear it!"

She replied with infinite chilliness and condescension: "Yes, that's what I mean."

"That you won't marry me some day?"

"Well, you can guess that, can't you?" she replied. And then she began to gather up the finery on the table as though to point to it: look at what I should be losing if I gave another answer at this moment! She turned round, her mother had put her head into the room, Old Lydia was speaking:

"Go to bed at once, Lydia! And you, Abel, go away this minute! And I won't have you running round here early and late, so now you know it! What's the brat up to with this tomfoolery? Are you quite right in the head? Go home and cut your teeth!"

The bedroom door shut, but opened again in a moment and Old Lydia spoke again, the Rasp said her last word: "Tell your father from me to take down your breeches and give you a good hiding!"

Abel was knocked flat. Then he got up and stood in a queer way with the chair between his legs. At last he pulled himself together a bit and looked first at the closed door and then at Little Lydia. His face looked rather blue, but he bore up pretty well and said with a laugh: "Well, I'm damned!"

He got no help from Little Lydia and she showed no recognition of his manly air. Not that she drove him out, he was far from hearing anything like Hurry up now, quick about it, mind yourself! No, Little Lydia was used to her mother's sharp tongue and was not afraid of it. But as Abel walked to the door it really seemed as though she was pleased with his way of taking himself off, she didn't say a word to hold him back.

"All right!" he said to save his face a little. "I'll keep out of the way if that's how it is!" Oh, but that was too much to promise;

he turned and asked Little Lydia: "Can't you come outside so that I can talk to you?"

"Nothing of the kind!" she replied.

Abel went home. His parents sat wrangling about something and as it didn't interest him he disappeared into the old parlour.

And yet the wrangling in the new parlour was by no means without interest; Oliver's weeks of cogitation on a certain subject had at last found vent in a kind of cross-examination of his wife: the fact was, Petra was again with child, and how in the world had it come about?

Strangely enough Petra herself had tried to conceal her condition as long as she could, just as if a married woman was not at liberty to put on weight, or as if she had even been doing something wrong; perhaps it was this that first made Oliver suspicious. But this evening when he met her with a direct accusation she gave up concealment and denied nothing.

"Petra," he said, "seems to me you're getting lumpy again?"

"What nonsense!" she replied.

"And how in the devil's name did you manage it?"

"I suppose it's no use denying it to you," she flattered him. "You see everything."

"Yes," he said; "I've seen it for numerous weeks."

Petra had had time to prepare herself, she didn't put the blame on him and say anything of this sort: You know very well how it happened! No, she took the blow, but turned it aside: "How did I manage it?" she said. "Why, it's no worse for me to have a baby than it is for Maren Salt."

"What's that—Maren Salt? What had she got to do with it?" Oliver could scarcely get the words out.

"Yes, I say that straight out," Petra went on, with a somewhat severe and aggrieved look at her husband. "She was much older than I am now, and I can't make out why certain people should be so gone on Maren."

"It beats me what you're driving at."

"Ah," said Petra. "But let me tell you they're accusing you of being the father of Maren Salt's baby."

Oliver opened his mouth wide. Had everybody gone mad! He said: "You—you must be out of your wits!"

Petra muttered and looked still more aggrieved.

"I wish I was as free from every sin!" he said.

"You know best what you are," she replied implacably.

But now Oliver's pride began to work, he turned it over. Why yes, when all was said and done he hadn't any objection to this accusation, he certainly didn't intend to take it as defamatory, at the most it was slightly insulting. "Who is it that's been putting this lie on you?" he asked.

Petra answered: "It don't matter who it was. But if so be you want to know, it was that Mattis."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes. And he must have had his reasons for it."

Oliver thought it over, cocked his cap on one side and threw out his chest. "A man has to put up with a lot!" he said. "But as far as that goes I don't care what you and Mattis think about me. Only he needn't be so sure I shan't summons him."

"It wouldn't do you much good to summons Mattis. You'd have to summons the whole town."

"Is the whole town talking about it?" asked Oliver.

"As far as I know it is."

Again he thought it over and considered. This was a remarkable and most unexpected situation for him to find himself in, Lord bless his soul! It would have to be turned to account in some way; he began to hum as he pondered. Petra looked at him searchingly, seemingly at a loss to make out the odd fit that had come over this man, this relic of a man: was he humming? Perhaps at this moment he was happier than he had been for twenty years, perhaps he felt some restitution within him, a dignity, a value, saw himself rehabilitated by means of a fraud, set in a

false light, but rehabilitated. Why did he sit there looking wealthy and exuberant? Had he been given bread and wine and a blessing, had the heavens opened, had a miracle taken place? You see, the poor wretch was no longer himself; once he had been abroad in the world, and at this moment he must have been abroad again; he licked his lips and gave himself an air, mimicking his old self of the days when he was lucky in finding nice sweethearts in every port. Petra was used to seeing him listless and fat, clinging to a crutch or flopping into a chair at the table; oh, he was like a jelly-fish that lay breathing in mortal stupidity and nullity by the edge of the quay, and now he sat there surprised and delighted about something; what was it?

Petra was more and more bewildered and this humming bothered her; if she hadn't known better she would have gone closer and looked at him, to see if he was Oliver Andersen and right in the head. She brought him back to reality by remarking: "You don't do anything but sing!"

"What?"

"You don't do anything but sing, I say."

"Sing? I just thought of it, tahitaho. No, I wasn't singing."

"Well, don't mind me. Some folks can't help it."

But what did Oliver do now? Got up from his chair and made a grab at her. An ape mimicking others' gestures, a pair of unpractised hands on the grasp. He acted the part, affected inability to resist her sweetness, her lasciviousness, put his tongue out, laughed with his slobbering mouth. Oh, she was up to the game! If only she had known that his foolery had the least thing behind it she would have met him half-way, helped him on even; as it was she started back from his idle antics with a shudder. On seeing this he sank back into his chair, flabby and nauseating.

It must have been difficult for Petra not to spit; she was a healthy, natural creature, the jelly-fish there filled her with fear and shame. To smooth it over she left off looking at him and

said, as though to herself: "No, it beats me what you could see in Maren Salt!"

Oliver answered feebly: "Be quiet! I didn't do it, I tell you!"

"You know best what you did!"

"All right, go on, believe it if you like! I don't care."

"No, of course you don't," Petra replied, like a martyr; "You're master of the house, aren't you? the rest of us haven't anything to say to your doings."

"Well, you wouldn't call me such a tyrant, would you?"

"You don't care for me anyway," she said.

By this time he was pretty nearly the old Oliver again and whipped out a question readily enough: "Oh, and who is it then that's cared for you?"

To this no answer was given, and perhaps he didn't want one either, but Petra was brazen and anyhow she knew how to keep him off: "If I'd been one of the willing ones you should just have seen," she said. "But I'm not one of those. I'm not so hard up as to pry into your doings, and Maren Salt she's sixty at least, so you're welcome to her!"

Evidently Petra had no intention of dropping this idiotic idea, so could Oliver be blamed for putting a good face on it and letting it pass? She was beginning to make him think she really suspected him, and this suspicion would only bring him profit and no loss if he used it rightly. "Ay ay," he said, half giving in; "I dare say I have my faults too; I don't know anybody that hasn't his faults and his dissipations and his sinful lusts."

It was extraordinary with what ease he won Petra's agreement to this and from now on there was not the slightest quarrel between them, on the contrary, their tone was light and frivolous. His cross-examination of his wife, his question how in the devil's name she had managed to get lumpy again, all this was washed out and vanished. Oliver let it pass, nay, he went further and afforded her a kind of appreciation, hinted something about her

being deuced prolific: forty years and the rest and as bad as ever!

"Well," she answered, half in jest; "don't you call me good now?"

"You?" he cried. "I don't know anybody like you, that I don't. And I must say you have it in you, I'll give you that praise. For upon my soul you didn't have to discover your sex by looking for it," he said; "you have it in you."

XXVII

IN THE morning Oliver must have had some return to his doubts; he asked Petra: "No, did Mattis say that?"

"Say what?"

"That I was the child's father?"

"Yes, I tell you!"

"I can't see what made him take that into his head."

Petra set her arms akimbo and answered: "No, you don't know anything about it, but perhaps Maren does."

"Does Maren say so too?"

"Anyway she's called the boy after you."

"After me?" cried Oliver. "What's his name?"

"Ole Andreas."

Silence. Yes, this fitted almost like a bung, and there was something in it, but all the same— Oh, those devils of women with their devices!

Petra concluded: "So you see, Mattis had his reasons for saying what he did."

At that Oliver seemed to pause and reflect: But how could I have managed it? And when he left the house and went across to Mattis it looked as if he wanted to hear further details.

It was Sunday morning and he found the carpenter half-dressed in the kitchen. The baby was with him, Maren Salt was at church. The carpenter looked with surprise and hostility at the man who humped in to him from the street.

"Good-morning!"

"Good-morning?"

Silence. As Oliver was not offered a chair he sat down on the wood box. They exchanged a word or two about the weather, the

cold that had set in; Mattis was taciturn, but talked now and again to the child on the floor.

"He's grown," said Oliver.

"Yes, there's nothing wrong there."

"How old is he? Why, just look, he's got some teeth already! What's his name?"

The carpenter's eyes kindled with wrath: "Never you mind. He's called the Baby here, that's all."

"I only asked. It's nothing to do with me anyway."

"His mother has given him a silly name, but she must have known what she was doing."

As the carpenter was so hostile and it took so long to get any definite insinuation out of him, Oliver had to lead up to it himself: "Who shall I say he's like?"

"His mother," replied Mattis curtly.

"His mother, yes. But on the father's side?"

"Who told you to ask?" exclaimed Mattis with irritation. "Perhaps you know the father?"

Oliver laughed and took it in a good-natured kind of way, but he had to make a show of protest: "Oh, you're the same old Mattis! I wish I was as free from every sin!"

"That's what they all say when they're in for it properly."

"What do you mean by that?"

"What do I mean? That they all deny it. And maybe the one that's most guilty is the one that denies it worst; that's my experience. They spend their money in bribery and corruption to make folks keep quiet about it."

Yes, Oliver backed him up in this and pitied the mothers, pitied the children: "Poor little children!" he said.

"They all say that too," replied Mattis, taking the child on his knees and talking to it: "Your Ma went away and left you, did she? Yes, you may look at the door, but she'll be out an hour yet, she don't care. Look, here's my watch to play with!"

Oliver kept silence; he was not listening to the carpenter's

prattle, he had got an idea. Oliver had a sluggish cunning of his own, his brain worked best in the dark and by side paths; now one hand was working into the inside pocket of his waistcoat, oh, so gently, so furtively, as if he only chanced to be scratching himself. Then he got hold of a couple of bank-notes and glanced down to see if they were right, and sat all the time as still as a mouse. There was nothing solid in the little Mattis the carpenter had said, he had not spoken out plainly, and again Oliver had to help things along: "I've heard say that the boy's called Ole Andreas, but that can't be right? I'll never believe it."

The carpenter raged: "Oh, you've heard that! Then what the hell did you ask for? I believe you've come to search the house. What do you want here?"

Oliver replied meekly, by no means displeased at the other's excitement: "Well, it's nothing to do with me what the boy's called and I won't ask you any more about it—"

"No, not when you know it!" snorted the carpenter through his big nose.

After a well calculated silence Oliver resumed as mildly as before: "I dare say you wonder at my coming to see you, Mattis?"

Mattis replied with a straight "Yes."

"I thought so!" But now Oliver brought two notes out into the light of day and asked: "Well, I came for a certain purpose. What was it those doors cost that you made for me one time?"

"Doors—?"

"The ones you let me have. I want to pay for them. It's stood over a long time, but it's not been so easy for me."

Mattis the carpenter was completely taken aback and could only say: "There's no hurry about it now either—"

"I can't expect you to wait till doomsday."

"Those doors? No, there wasn't any hurry. Was it the doors you came about?"

Oliver spoke like a just and worthy man: "You see, Mattis,

you never sent me a bill, so there's some excuse for me; but now we won't quarrel about the price, I'll pay every farthing. And if there's been anything wrong between us I want to put it right."

Mattis muttered that there might have been faults on both sides. He seemed to regret his irritation and said: "Can't you sit on that chair there?" However, he was still reserved and seemed not to care for the visit; most of the time he talked to the child.

"Ah, he's well off here with you!" remarked Oliver. "A big thing for him! Well, I must say Maren deserves a helping hand. She's not a bad figure of a woman."

"Oh," said Mattis.

"Not at all a bad figure. And a couple of years ago when she had the child she wasn't so old as she is now. So we needn't be so surprised at her."

"No, you're not to put the watch in your mouth, you'll swallow it, child! As far as that goes, it isn't always age that matters," said the carpenter with a knowing air, turning to Oliver. "It's only these nostrils of theirs that keep on beckoning you."

"Ha ha ha, yes, you've hit it, Mattis! What was I going to say?—he has brown eyes, I see."

No answer.

"They say they're good eyes, the brown ones. But I've got blue eyes for my part and I've got on all right with them. But nearly all my children, they've got brown eyes; it looks just as if I wasn't to have any children unless they had brown eyes."

Still the carpenter had made no accusation, though he didn't exempt him either, as he replied: "His mother has brown eyes. But you mustn't say this sort of thing before the child, he understands."

"He doesn't understand."

"He? You can't talk about a thing that he doesn't understand. Not a blessed thing. If you say 'door' he looks at the door, and if you sing a little verse at the bench he knows it's for him."

"Just like it was with mine!" declared Oliver.

No, the carpenter wouldn't allow this, there couldn't possibly be another child like this one.

Oliver resumed: "Well, anyway he's lucky to be in the house with you." But all the same Oliver was disappointed with the way things were going, he was not getting on at all, he would have to go a bit further yet, nearer the edge: "What was I going to say again, I'm so forgetful! Ah yes, here I've got the money, as you see; but there's something I'd like to ask you, and that is, you've got the child here in your house and you've got fond of him; but supposing now his father came one day and owned up and confessed—?"

The carpenter asked sharply: "Are you going to bring him?"

"I? Bring the father? Where should I find him? I'm only a cripple."

"Oh, you're fit for anything!"

Oliver smiled: "I don't want to make myself out better than I am, far from it. But that wasn't what we were talking about. Some fine day perhaps you won't have the child with you any longer—"

"Oh, will they come and take him? They'd better try!" threatened Mattis.

"I meant that one fine day you'll be changing your condition and getting married, and then where's the child to go?"

"Go?" roared the carpenter. "Do you think I'll throw him out? He shan't go anywhere, I'll see about that!"

"But if the father comes—"

"Who is it you're trying to ferret this out for? What the hell do you want to know? Are you afraid of something, are you scared about your own skin? You're just filling his ears with indecent talk and I won't have it."

Oliver just managed to put in: "I? I'm not saying anything indecent, I'm just waiting here with your money, these two notes—"

"I never heard the like, sitting down here and playing the innocent and talking a lot of filth! Money—what's that for? Ah!" he exclaimed suddenly, as a light broke in on him at last. He turned pale with anger and got up with the child on his arm: "Keep your money and get out, I won't touch it!"

Well, Oliver got up, he didn't want to fight, but as he humped to the door he riled the carpenter by saying: "Hey, one would almost think the child was yours! Is it you that's the father?"

"I, do you say?"

"I only ask," replied Oliver. And now there was no doubt he was trying to stir up Mattis the carpenter some more: "Wasn't it you that made a cradle for him?"

Mattis defended himself: "It wasn't for him. And do you lie on the bare floor yourself, I'd like to know? Have you never heard before of a child having a cradle? But now you're going to get out of here, that's certain sure!" cried Mattis, putting down the child. "And take your bribe with you! Ha ha, you thought you could buy me to keep quiet about you being the father, but it didn't come off. Keep your money for somebody else. Oh, what a swine you are! Out of my house, I say!"

And Oliver went.

He looked pleased with himself, as though things could hardly have gone better, he was positively humming again. When he reached home of course Petra was bursting with curiosity, but he told her nothing; he was just more of a man than ever and he posted himself at the street door with his hand inside his waistcoat, though it was not at all cold, and stood there chaffing with the women and girls that passed.

Good times, no troubles in the house and all going happily—oh, we're coming up in the world, we're getting more and more on top; please God we can keep on like this! And there were quite a lot of pretty doings to show it: Mattis the carpenter, you know, had got that red letter-box on the wall of his house, but Oliver bought a brass handle to his front door and said to

Petra: "Let me see that you keep it bright!" At the risk of being caught throwing money about he bought little presents both for his daughters and for his wife and showed himself kind-hearted; he even brought Grandmamma a bag of coffee oftener than usual—though that didn't cost him anything.

How cheering it was now to be alive! The winter went by, the year went by, and Oliver was right, nothing went so quickly as a year. Nothing much happened, but enough to make a change, the family didn't expect more; the new baby was one of the blue-eyed sort again, and how the blazes could anyone make that out all at once? but the question no longer had the same enormous importance as in old days. Ought he to take Petra to task? What would happen if he himself were taken to task? hadn't he got a certain notoriety of his own in town? One day when he expressed some angry surprise at the appearance of these new blue eyes in the family Petra replied: "Well, haven't you and I both got blue eyes?"

In a conversation with his old friend Jörgen Fisherman Oliver pointed out that the plants of the earth were not all alike either: that some bore fruit above ground and some under. "Take apples now—some are red and some yellow. But then take potatoes which grow underground—one sort of potato is yellow and another sort perfectly blue. And it's just the same with our human eyes, they're all sorts of different colours. I've been thinking that perhaps it's to be put down to myself: that when I'm most mad on women it's brown eyes—what do you think, Jörgen?"

Well, Jörgen he was over seventy, married to Old Lydia, the Rasp, father of three lady daughters, he had got eyes almost the colour of milk, he didn't know—didn't remember. "How do you mean, mad?" he said. He expressed the opinion that there was many a female to be found who could be mad and shrewish.

But Oliver seemed bent upon making his meaning perfectly clear: "Now take Maren Salt for instance," he said. "You know,

they accuse me of being the father of her boy, and he has brown eyes."

"Ah," replied Jörgen Fisherman.

"Or take a lot of others in town, there's plenty of brown eyes, and I can't hardly get anything else. Now you mustn't go believing everything folks accuse me of, Jörgen, I beg you not to do that; but I won't excuse myself either, for I have a terrible fiery nature in me, and in my own family it's brown eyes and blue eyes, just as it happens."

"Ay," said Jörgen Fisherman.

Thus Oliver was rising day by day, occupying an ever firmer position in his make-believe world. Let him alone, he was its creator and sustainer, he had his own standard and could make it as wide as he liked; after a couple of years he stood on a height and surveyed a great country which was his.

And how did he manage to exist in this world of his own making? He didn't burst into a laugh and give it up? If one creates a world one has to make the best of it; that is the fate of all creators.

Now and again he had vexations to swallow. He might feel in the humour to go out one evening and take a turn in the street, do a little courting, get the women to listen to him. He knew what to say and how to set about it from his sailor days, but his old luck was gone, his shots missed fire, whether it was that he had lost his old marksmanship or that he did not find the right game. What was the matter, why did the girls laugh at him? These tender offshoots, didn't they seen able to believe in his honourable intentions? What the devil made them shudder when he tried to get hold of them? There were some drawbacks to managing a world.

Latterly he had taken to rowing out to sea again. Ah yes, this had always been a good scheme when trials got the upper hand, when life was hard on him. He was supposed to be fishing to

earn a little extra money, but this fishing seemed not to be very serious, he so often returned without catching anything. But wasn't he in want of cash, wasn't there a bottom to his remarkable inside pocket? Oh, it made him anxious when he saw his pocket growing empty, he could have borrowed to check its shrinkage, he could have stolen, it is not good to be reduced to poverty under one's very eyes. He had his old place at the warehouse and his wages, yes, he could meet the daily expenses right enough, but he could no longer afford the little extras in the way of sweetstuff and finery that he had grown accustomed to. What after all had become of the money he got for the eiderdown? It was a good lump of money and the deuce only knew where it had gone! He hadn't paid Lawyer Fredriksen anything on the house, nor had he fitted out himself and his family with clothes for two years; he had gone to the next town to change a couple of big notes, but that was a year ago now. His inside pocket was empty. He might look into it, he might turn it inside out, but it was empty.

So wasn't he obliged to go fishing?

Actually Oliver had no objection to rocking in a boat again. He provided himself with cooking-pot and fishing-tackle and rowed out, was often away from Saturday evening to Monday morning and fished in the first place to provide the meals he wanted during this time. They were lazy hours, free from care, he drifted oftener than he rowed, pried into creeks and explored islands; naturally he began to collect eiderdown again, naturally he kept his eyes open for wreckage and driftwood. One day he found an empty breaker, another time a bottle with a paper in it, nothing of any value. Far out, in the track of the steamers, a bird rock rose straight up out of the sea; he had not been there for two years, it was such a long way out, but it would be worth while paying it a visit, the birds nested on shelves in the rock and were not shy.

The days went by and Abel was a good boy and a kind boy,

he would slip a two-crown piece into his father's hand on occasion, otherwise there would have been few sweeties for Oliver. For how could he afford them? He had once had a son called Frank, a learned boy and a wonder; oh, but he sent nothing at all home, he had given up coming himself and he never wrote; rumour said that he had a place as teacher somewhere and was going on with his studies, nothing but studies, where would it end? Little Constance Henriksen of the Shipyard had had a letter from him, he had one more year, he said, then he was finished. So Oliver could expect no help from him for a year, a long year, but then it would be something worth having; it wasn't everybody who had a learned son to fall back upon!

And in the meantime he had Abel, a regular trump too; Oliver was just and made no difference between his sons; if anything perhaps Abel was now nearer his father's heart. He often wandered into the forge on his way to the warehouse in the morning; Abel was already at work and it amused his father to have a chat with him and hear how things were going. They always went remarkably well, Abel had now taken over the forge and was boss of it all; that was a son to have. There were others who called at the forge; the Drawing-pin came, who was fireman in the mail boat; he was waiting no doubt till one of Abel's sisters was old enough, that was what the Drawing-pin had in his head. He called and said: "Have you bought the forge?"—"No," said Abel, "I haven't anything to buy it with, but I'm taking the place of the master blacksmith. Can you find me a hammerman?"—"Well," said the Drawing-pin, "you've only got to buy yourself a steam-hammer that's worked with petroleum and you'll save having a hammerman."—"Don't come talking nonsense to me!" replied Abel.—"I'm not talking nonsense," protested the other; "I've seen lots of those hammers at Horten."—Abel knew all about the steam-hammers driven by petroleum, but why should he buy one for a forge that wasn't his? Stop talking about it!—The Drawing-pin proposed that Abel might buy the

hammer on his own account and put the hammerman's board and wages in his own pocket, and that was an arrangement which would pay Blacksmith Carlsen too.—"Where am I to find the money for a hammer like that?" asked Abel.—The Drawing-pin replied: "I suppose you've got some yourself, I could lend you some more and the rest you can owe."—The Drawing-pin must have been pretty badly in love with Blue-eyes, Abel's sister!

No, the forge did not yet belong to Abel, but it was now in his hands and he was earning good wages. Blacksmith Carlsen was not always away from the forge, not entirely away, but he was mostly to be found at the vise, filing or polishing, he interfered less and less with the working. "What do you think?" he would ask Abel when for once in a way he took on a job. For that matter he didn't do half a day's work now, he came late and went early. Thus it was that Oliver could have his son entirely to himself when he came on his morning visits.

They chatted about their small affairs and discussed the events in town: "No, that Jörgen Fisherman's getting more and more of an idiot," said Oliver; "he don't know the difference between yellow potatoes and blue potatoes, why should I waste my time talking to a man like that? I run off as soon as I catch sight of him."—Father and son never disagreed, they talked amicably about everything, talked fraternally, in a way, about the things nearest their hearts; at parting they had not arranged a coup or made up their minds to a particular view of life, far from it, but Oliver had heard all about what his son had to do to-day, for whose carriage he was making this iron-work, it was Consul Johnsen's country house; who owned the fine screen that had been here since yesterday, that was the Doctor. Ah, that Abel, he was something of a son, he worked for all the quality!

Abel asked: "What do you think about that steam-hammer I told you of? You promised to think it over."

Naturally his father hadn't the slightest idea of this marvellous hammer, the son must have known that to start with; wasn't

Abel a queer boy, wanting to hear his father's opinion? But perhaps he had nobody else to talk to; he was never the least patronizing, he listened to his father with inward sympathy and seemed to need his father's approval of all he undertook.

"I'll tell you," replied Oliver, "that I've been far over the world and have seen all manner of nations, and now I've thought it over abundantly. And if you can get that hammer, you'd better take it the first thing you do. That's my advice."

"Ah."

"Yes, I say so right out. For there's no other master in any trade who has a steam-hammer like that; it'll be the talk of town and country, and you'll just see the sparks, Abel, when that fellow comes down on the iron!"

"Yes."

"It'll get you into the papers, you can believe my word, for I've been in the paper myself. I salved a foreign full-rigged ship out at sea in squalls and tempest and brought her in to the quay. Then I just sent ashore for the Consul to make his report. What do you suppose they thought of it, all the people that came down and saw it! And three days after I was in the paper."

"Yes."

An event Oliver was never tired of tiring other people with. But he didn't forget the steam-hammer for all that; no, he declared he couldn't get it out of his head. And if one of these days he could be of any help to his son, supposing he got hold of any money that *was* money, why then he'd bring it along at once. "Just give me time to have a look round!" he said, nodding with a reflective air, as though he might soon light upon a possibility. Oh, he'd find money somehow, even if he had to row out every night and bring home loads of driftwood that he could sell—

Just prattle and fair words. Abel was just as poor when his father left, rather poorer in fact, as he lost two crowns in a

bet. The way of it was that Abel said: "You can't row out at night any more, you haven't the strength."—"I've just as much strength as ever in my arms and shoulders," replied his father. —"You can't even lift that pig of iron there."—"Oh, can't I? Didn't I lift it last year?"—"Yes, but now you're a year older. Anyway, I'll bet this two crowns you can't."—Oliver didn't even spit on his hands, he lifted the pig and won the two crowns. "I won't take it!" he said.—"No, perhaps you'd rather I heaved the pig at you!" replied his son, handing over the coin.

Just playfulness and friendly jocularity.

Neither of them mentioned Little Lydia or hinted any more at marriage; no, Abel was now a much older and steadier man. It was true that he still wore most of his beard on the backs of his hands, but he had a forge under him and took the place of the master, and that had matured him. There had been other contributory causes, however; thus Old Lydia had had a certain influence on his development. He might shrink from acknowledging it, but one evening a couple of years ago the old Rasp had certainly given him a lesson he had not forgotten. There had been something in what she said, an awakening crash in his ears, the natural consequence of which was that he kept away from Jörgen Fisherman's house. Very well, he'd keep out of the way as he had promised. It was very pressing that he should find out when Edevart was coming home from New Guinea or wherever it was, but he walked past the house. Later on he had met Old Lydia; she seemed very friendly now it was all over and had not only nodded a greeting but had said a few words in passing, and he had been polite in return. A few weeks went by and he met his sweetheart herself, Little Lydia herself. *The strange thing was that he would rather not have met her,* anyhow not at that moment, when he was leaving the forge begrimed and in his working clothes. As the encounter could not be avoided he felt miserable about the knees, but managed to give a kind of greeting and pass on. It was from that time his

bashfulness dated. Afterwards he met her now and then in town with parcels in her arms; he might have stepped forward and carried them for her, but he did not.

No, he didn't talk of marriage any more.

As his father was leaving he called to him: "You didn't lift that pig so high as you did last year!"

"What didn't I do?" his father shouted back. "I'd have done it with you sitting on top."

Perhaps it was a sign of unusually good humour that Oliver could joke away so gaily? But far from it, he had unusually gloomy forebodings today. When he was alone in the warehouse and had put himself straight and looked at himself in the glass and started his work, it became plain to him that he was faced with a danger: he had met Lawyer Fredriksen in town again. That extortioner, that bloodsucker, he had given a cripple a look as if he owned him. And now it was two years since the last affair.

Oliver exaggerated things so enormously; the Lawyer had walked past him in an ordinary and decent way, sunk in thought, but Oliver was no longer the man of courage, his inside pocket was empty, the recovery of his character was a thing of the past. When he came home to dinner he had a talk with Petra; it was no news to her, she too had met the Lawyer.

Oliver asked: "Did he say anything?"

"He say anything! Do you think he'd say anything to me—in the street?"

"How did you think he was looking?"

"I don't know. Looking? I don't look at men-folk and I'm not likely to look at him. The old swine worried me enough last time he was home."

"It seemed to me he had a wicked look."

After a while Oliver went on: now of course Lawyer Fredriksen would start his exorbitant demands again.—"I'm not going to trot round to him any more," said Petra.—Oh? was it better

to be turned out of house and home, the whole lot of them? And Oliver argued it from his point of view: he had never had such a horror of being homeless as now. It was to be hoped the Lawyer was human, but if he actually had murderous designs against a cripple, Petra would have to give him a straight talking-to once more.

"What do you think about it?" asked Oliver.

Petra thought it over and didn't consider it impossible. But there was a good deal to be said against it; she hadn't even any clothes that would do—

Clothes?

She'd worn out those wretched chemises. And didn't she want a blouse too, one of those with an open neck? And other things besides?

If that was all the trouble Oliver could certainly get some clothes against his wages. He blazed up again, cocked his cap on one side as though he had mighty friends at his back, and spoke like the mainstay of his family: "I'll go right down to the millinery department and get those things for you!"

On an occasion like this it was his duty to exert his powers to the utmost.

XXVIII

BUT THE last thing Lawyer Fredriksen had in his mind just now was upsetting Oliver and his household; he had very different affairs to occupy him. In these days there befell the town a trial, a convulsion so immense that the earth seemed to stand still. What was the robbery at the post office compared with the news that the steamship *Fia* had gone to the bottom! What signified anything at all when the steamship *Fia* was not insured and would perhaps drag down Double Consul Johnsen himself to ruin and destruction!

Nothing else signified.

Several other serious events had preceded it: there was the death of the old schoolmaster, the man who knew all manner of tongues and had brought up the last generation in grammar and necessary knowledge; he it was who was dead and all his learning was buried with him. Another affair was thoroughly threshed out at the pump; for the last two months the Doctor's wife had been lamenting that she was with child; it was her first time, and heavens above, how she loathed it and how sick she was—and was there no possible cure for this disaster, was there no such thing as justice on earth! Then suddenly one day the Doctor's wife was no longer with child. What? shrieked the women at the pump, as they stopped pumping and instead of walking away with their pails, took up their station and stayed where they were. Had the woman made a mistake about her inside—? Nonsense! Far from it! But it was very unfair the way women were treated by Providence, some had to be mothers year after year, others got off as long as they lived. That was what it was to be married to a doctor, he had the knowledge, he could do what he liked, no trouble there—

So there was no lack of sensation.

But then one morning the thunderclap fell upon the pump when the news of the *Fia's* loss was received. It came from Scheldrup Johnsen in New Orleans, the cablegram was three days old, he announced it in so many words, mentioned time and place and assumed that the insurance was in order.

In the little coast town which lived on its shipping and nothing else every woman understood what insurance meant, so how was it Double Consul Johnsen did not understand it? Wasn't it precisely one of the big things he kept in his own hands, leaving Berntsen to manage the shop and the millinery business? It led to a scene between the Consul and his right-hand man: the Consul was under the impression that he had given Berntsen orders to renew the insurance, and sure enough Berntsen had renewed it that time, but not again.—But the Consul had given the order once for all.—No, replied Berntsen, he had not understood it so.—The Consul tore his hair and insisted that Yes, he had expressly intended it for always, for life. Besides, Berntsen must have guessed as much himself; didn't he see all the papers that encumbered the Consul's desk, all the things he had to deal with, the enormous daily mail, the reports to his Governments, the books, a mass of things, a chaos—hadn't Berntsen seen that for himself?—And it appeared that Berntsen had in fact lent a hand to some purpose, otherwise the Consul's desk would have looked a good deal worse.—Yes, but the Consul had put out the insurance documents to be dealt with.—Berntsen had noticed the documents, and after he had had his eye on them for three weeks they disappeared.—Why yes, the Consul had put them away at last, assuming they had received attention.—Berntsen had not heard a word about attending to them.—Yes, damn it! the Consul had told him long ago that he must send the premium: "Don't forget the insurance," were his words. Oh, God forgive him!

Fru Johnsen came rocking down to the office and wept, wrung her hands, dried her nose and eyes, wailed and was incoherent;

it was pretty hard on the lady, she evidently had some liver complaint too, which made her so yellow in the face. The daughter came, Fröken Fia; she took it in quite a different way and did not add to her father's burden. It couldn't be helped, she said, trials must be borne. They ought to show that they had culture, said she, said the Countess; she for her part would work harder than ever, she had her art and her calling, the two pictures she had copied in the Louvre would have to go, she would send them at once to an auction. Don't be afraid, Papa!

The Consul heard and saw nothing.

But there was another man in town who both heard and saw, Lawyer Fredriksen, oh, a cute fellow, a lucky winner, a regular devil for figuring right. At last he had come home after his long sittings in the Storthing and on his Commission, and now his appearance was more presentable than before, he didn't look so voracious, God knows if he hadn't had face massage. What else could have given him that almost spiritual mildness? No doubt it was partly the effect of his having been elected Chairman of the Town Council in his absence, but that was hardly enough to make a lawyer seek out all the recesses of poverty and affliction and sit there for half an hour at a time in sheer condolence. He visited the Schoolmaster's daughter who had lost her father and the Postmaster who had lost his wits, and everywhere he made himself very pleasant. That was the sort of man he had become. Why, the moment he stepped ashore from the boat that shameless Olaus, the grazier had been familiar and called him plain Fredriksen; but he had received it with a smile and said: "Carry up my trunk then, Olaus." Olaus replied: "You can carry your own trunk!"

Before throwing himself once more into his onerous public duties and summoning a first meeting of the Town Council he took a little holiday and went about in light clothes and a big hat; he had bought a stick and his boots were sound, he smoked nothing but cigars, he was quite a different man. What was he

after, what made this heavy man toil right up to the Belvedere? It looked far-fetched, lonesome and recherché, it might smack of love and deeper feelings. When he went past Consul Johnsen's garden with its cement urns and its scent of lilacs and its butterflies he took off his big hat to Fru Johnsen, with whom he had no quarrel, to Fröken Fia, nay, to the Consul himself if they were sitting in the veranda. He might be Chairman of a Commission directed against the Consul, but that did not affect his attitude to his family and home.

"Welcome back from Paris!" he thundered over the paling to Fröken Fia.

It was a good while now since she came back from Paris, she probably thought, and she could just as well have welcomed him back from the Storthing, but she only acknowledged his greeting with a careless nod. Who could understand that girl!

He propped his round arms on the paling and did not go away just yet: "I expect you find it's good to be at home again?" he said.

"Yes."

"I find the same thing."

Could you beat the Consul for impoliteness? he sat there in the veranda reading a paper; at last he noticed the Lawyer and raised his hat, but turned back at once to his paper.

"Oh yes, I find the same, I feel it's good to be at home again. Although I haven't much of a home to boast of."

"Won't you come in?" asked Fru Johnsen.

"Oh no, thanks, it's getting late. I'm only out for a stroll till bedtime. I can bring you greetings from the Belvedere, Fröken Fia."

"It must have been nice up there this evening?"

"Glorious. A sunset with extra fine clouds. I'm not a judge of such things like you painters and artists, you know, but to my taste it was something unique. Couldn't you be persuaded to take a little turn up there?"

"Now? No."

"Oh no. And you prefer going alone, don't you?"

Now the Consul was re-lighting his cigar, but even while doing so he could scarcely tear himself from his paper; what in the world was it that interested him so much? And what was the matter with his wife? The same Fru Johnsen had not always been so chary of words, in old days she had chattered away merrily when Lawyer Fredriksen condescended to talk to her, indeed she actually seemed to like him. How grand and rich these people had become, and how they couldn't help showing it! Look, there was the daughter of the house, she was old enough years ago and pretty enough and more, and there she sat with a padlock on her mouth, simply because she was such a rich and excellent match. For that matter Lawyer Fredriksen might have been of considerable use to the family, he was no longer a nobody, he was a Storthingsman and a great man, he might be greater still, he had almost certain prospects of being greater still, the new elections would decide that. What was he standing here for, courting from the wrong side of the paling? It was not fitting for a person like him; let her come within his reach, let him get hold with his little finger! He had learnt something in the great capital, he'd do better next time, he'd take her in his arms—

"Good evening!" he bowed and went away.

A good while after the Consul looked up and raised his hat in return, but then there was nothing to be seen but the Lawyer's back and the roll of his neck under the hat. What arrogance! And how about his reading? The Consul flung away the paper and rose slowly to his feet; he yawned loudly and said: "Now I'm off to bed."

"Well, good-night," said the ladies.

All breathed peace and no danger. But the day after the thunderbolt fell.

Lawyer Fredriksen first heard it at the Barber's; afterwards he had met the Druggist and got it confirmed. As a matter of

fact the Lawyer had thought of getting a clean shave and swaggering up to the Belvedere past Consul Johnsen's garden a few times more, but on hearing of the loss of the steamship *Fia* he resolutely changed his plans and took the road to Chandler Olsen's house. There was no uncertainty in his walk, no mystery, he had figured something out and figured it right; of course he was going to Chandler Olsen's now, where else should he go? There was scope and expansion in his walk.

He was expected. Fröken Olsen blushed when she heard his voice; for two days she had known that he was back and in these two whole days he had not called.

"No, they've made me Chairman of the Town Council while I was away," he explained; "I had to post myself in all these new affairs, I've been working. And in the evening I was so tired that I had to go for lonely walks. Otherwise I should have taken the liberty of calling on you at once."

"I heard Papa and Mamma say you were home."

She went no further than that, Fröken Olsen; but if at that moment he had given her to understand that she could not possibly escape his frantic love any longer, she would no doubt have wavered. It was over two years since their last talk, she was not getting any younger, a couple of letters in the interval had just succeeded in keeping alive her dying memory of him. Nothing had come of it with the other artist, the house painter's son, he was only a flighty bohemian; he had no difficulty in falling in love with one person or another, oh, all the time, but he had no constancy. The last thing he did was to go down to the quay. and paint Olaus the grazier! That was not a proper thing to do after painting Consul Olsen's family; to be sure, Consul Olsen's family were not proud, but they didn't want to be common talk. And besides—marrying a painter was a rash proceeding, her sister had tried it and had not always found it amusing, there was even talk of a divorce—the latest fashion in this country. She now had two children and in her earlier married life had spent

a good deal of time at home with the old people to save expenses, and on leaving she had always been loaded with money and all kinds of boxes. Within the last year, it was true, this state of things had changed, the painter had made a bigger name, he exhibited in Berlin and got higher prices for his art. The result was that now it was the painter who hinted at divorce, now he could stand on his own feet. It was all so sad and so foolish; so far the catastrophe had been warded off, but at any rate it was an unhappy marriage. Oh, these artist connections were not always of long duration!

But what about the Magistrate's Deputy? Gone away. He was here a year, then he got into the Audit Department; nobody missed him, nobody regretted him. His successor was another graduate of law, who turned out to have a sweetheart and a regular engagement—what use was he here and what could Fröken Olsen make of him? When he came to pay his call she didn't walk right out of the house, she didn't do that, but she just stayed up in her room in a general way, why should she come down? Afterwards she saw him in town, and he looked like an exile, in his shiny trousers, so woebegone and lackadaisical, but with an engagement ring on his finger. A man like that could only be left in peace.

And so Fröken Olsen had stayed at home, getting older and nursing her memories. Her heart can hardly have yearned for the Lawyer, but he was not altogether out of her thoughts, he might pass for a bird in the hand. How was he getting on, had he the prospect of becoming a Minister? It was still Nature herself who directed her policy, some day she too must be a married woman.

"Won't you light a cigar?" she said to the Lawyer.

He began to speak of the shipwreck; it was a writing on the wall for the Johnsen family and no mistake. Just imagine, leaving a steamer uninsured! What did the Consul do all the time in his office, if he could forget a thing of such unique importance? There

were limits to everything! Of course one ought to feel sympathy with people's misfortunes, but God knew best, perhaps the worthy Johnsens would be no worse off for this chastisement. They had grown so piggishly stupid and high-and-mighty all of them.

"I don't know," said Fröken Olsen; "I don't think Scheldrup is stupid."

The Lawyer replied carelessly: "I don't know either what Scheldrup is or is not. I'm speaking of the daughter and the parents."

"I wonder how Scheldrup will take it. What do you think he will do?"

At this the Lawyer looked at her from an entirely different world, and he could not resist a frown as he did so: "Your question is such an odd one; I really haven't considered it, I have other things to think of. You ask what this boy or that will do? I don't know. I suppose he'll have to do what he has been doing. Doesn't he stand behind a counter or something of that sort?"

"Scheldrup! No, he never stood behind a counter."

"Didn't he? Well, it's a matter of indifference to me."

The Lawyer was irritated by this chatter and tried to keep up

"Perhaps he'll come home and take over the business."

his superior air: "I really haven't had time to occupy myself with the question of who may take over the bankrupt estate and the little shop. Perhaps Scheldrup is the man for it, I don't know. Has he learnt anything?"

"Learnt? Why, that's what he's been doing abroad all these years."

"Oh? Going to school, studying at foreign universities? Strange that no one has heard of it!"—But at this point it must have struck the Lawyer that he was going about it in a hopelessly wrong way: "It's not a question of Scheldrup Johnsen at all," he said; "it's the other members of the family who might have

their proud necks bent without any great harm. It was them I meant."

Fröken Olsen could afford to put in a word for Fia: "She paints so nicely."

"Do you think so?" Here the Lawyer looked as if he might be forced to express himself otherwise. To Fröken Olsen's question: "Well, don't you think so too?" he replied: "Shan't we talk about something else—you and I?"

Now he was coming to business.

And it is quite possible that he would have served his cause better by keeping his mouth shut. He hadn't the knack. Fröken Olsen must of course have found his prolonged coolness extraordinary, and now he was to explain himself, to come to his own rescue; it was no simple task. Where should he have learnt the difficult art of wooing a heart when his mind was on the dowry? Besides, his lion's voice was against him, it was made for conflict and debate, but now it was to breathe soft words, to sing after a fashion; truly, many a man would have given it up. He saw nothing of the danger and simply went ahead.

Luckily Fröken Olsen was not too critical. In the course of years she had learnt some fine tricks, but she still possessed a proper discrimination and was no youngster. Fia Johnsen had not really left her behind either, for all her Countess's airs.

And the Lawyer began far too emphatically, the clown, the ox: co-operation, he said; could he not hope for co-operation between them? Had she thought it over?

To this she made no reply; but what was co-operation? She seemed to think in any case that it was a word which gave her the choice between turning red as fire or getting up and going.

He explained at some length how he had thought and thought about her in these two years—yes, perhaps she had forgotten him during this time, but he had forgotten nothing, he had documents to refer to, his two letters. All the statements he had made

at their preliminary conference were repeated in his letters and still held good. Therefore, Froken Olsen, the question now was this: did a certain understanding and inclination exist on both sides?

No reply. He waited quite a long time, and at last she said, in his own words: "Let us talk about something else!"

Was this affectation again? He can't have felt quite sure of himself any longer, her chatter about Scheldrup Johnsen had unsettled him, she had insisted so strongly that he didn't stand behind a counter and she could imagine his coming home and taking over the business; what did all this mean at a moment like the present? Deuce take it, he couldn't sing, but he went on talking: Did she require more time for reflection? For him the time had arrived; this very morning his uncertainty had driven him to come for the sole purpose of hearing how matters stood. But perhaps the fact was that she required even more time for reflection?

"Yes," was all she said.

Really? He was bound to confess he could scarcely believe it, after a lapse of two long years and after what had been between them. Didn't she honestly think that this town had become a dull hole? A town of sorrow and bankruptcy and misery, but elsewhere people laughed and had a good time. What kind of amusements had they here?

She admitted with a smile: "I am not used to amusements."

But she could be! it appeared. Oh, elsewhere they had fine streets and shop windows and Tivoli and cafés, did not such things tempt her? And as regards one's style of living, one could settle that oneself, you couldn't think of a single thing that was not to be had. All the amenities of life were at one's call, the papers were delivered morning and evening, the band played, the flag waved on the Storthing; on Sundays one could lie in bed all day long if one liked, or one could go to the theatre or drive in a street-car or walk in the Promenade or listen to a good

lecture. What was there to do here? If her wishes were the same as his she would leave this place—

This again was not exactly singing, but it was not so bad all the same and Fröken Olsen ought to have shown some interest; but no. God knew what could make this lady turn a little giddy. He moved nearer to her by two cautious stages and at last he was close to her; oh, he had learnt something in the capital, he groped less timorously, he got his arm around her and said: "Dear Fröken Olsen," he said; "if we could understand one another better—"

She got up, she did, got right up, but she did not run for the door; the lady was not faced by anything inevitable, she merely looked at him and said: "I hope you're a gentleman, Fredriksen?"

Of course. Hm. But most ladies like a little courting, he said, nodding and winking one eye as though he knew all about it. He had meant no harm by it, he only wished to draw a little nearer, and she knew who he was, they were old acquaintances—

"Yes, I know that," she replied, and sat down on the sofa.

Well now, you see, he had met any number of ladies, to be sure, had been to parties and been invited to the Palace and had heard great singers and all—oh, no doubt some of them were tip-top and first-rate according to his taste, they wore low dresses and curtsied to the ground and wore diamonds and chains round their necks. But as for setting up house and choosing them for one's life's companion—no! thundered Fredriksen, shaking his head. For that, on the other hand, he had always remembered a certain lady in his own little town, and on her he had set his hopes—

"On Fia," said Fröken Olsen.

How plump it came out! He was nonplussed for the moment but could only ask: "What makes you mention her?"

Fröken Olsen smiled.

"Fia," he said. "Let her be, let her go about in her red hat

and let her paint. Don't you agree with me, one couldn't imagine a more useless creature? But that doesn't concern us, I don't understand why we're talking about her. But don't misunderstand me, Fröken Olsen, art and pretty pictures are very important things in their way. But, my goodness, how unlike you that female is; she wouldn't make half of you, lean and skinny and spindle-shanked! God bless my soul!"

It could not have been displeasing to Fröken Olsen to be preferred for once in a way and given the first place, and the Lawyer for his part laid it on thick: if she had not been spoilt with appreciation she was to get it now! Fröken Olsen actually got up and put the ash-tray by him so that he might be comfortable, and at this sign of friendliness, of domesticity, love carried him away and he took her round the waist. She repeated her protest: "You must behave like a gentleman, Fredriksen!" and did not vanish like a dream, but happened to fall into the chair by his side. You see, he was no dangerous cannibal, he was only rather crude and unpolished like all men—a thing which, by the way, was not unbecoming in men.

"But you must admit that you have been greatly taken up with Fia," she said.

With Fia! How could she say such a thing, how could she mention her name! A painting woman, an anæmic creature! He would go all round the world for Fröken Olsen, but he wouldn't do that for Fia's pictures. There, you see! Art—oh yes, but for everyday he preferred Fröken Olsen's legs and arms and bust and figure altogether. "Oh, Fröken!" he said.

"She has nice teeth."

Was it still Fia they were talking about? It was perfectly damnable how Fröken Olsen would stick to a subject when she had once started. He answered her by leaning over towards her, leaning considerably over, by getting his arm around her and making himself comfortable against her warm back. And of course he talked the whole time: Now he would tell her who had nice

teeth. And now he'd tell her who was a fine handsome girl and an ornament to her rich home. And he had been to bigger places and higher places, he might say, so he could make comparisons, and he would maintain that for a lovely figure and stature and everything else—whereas Fia—"take a look at yourself, Fröken, and then look at Fia; God help me, it's like dropping from the clouds down to earth. And besides, all she says and does and looks—it's nothing but tricks and affectation, lace and trimmings!"

Here Fröken Olsen could not help laughing at the lace, and this gave the Lawyer fresh courage: "If it was even lace on her knickers!" he said.

He felt her back slipping away a little, as though she would get up, but his arm held her fast: Yes, he couldn't help saying that right out. And ho ho ho, he laughed, one didn't want to marry empty air. He was not one of those who hated the joys of life; on the contrary, he was a friend of pleasant follies and amenities of that kind, and unless he were mistaken Fröken Olsen herself was made exactly for that very thing. Wasn't that so?

"Now you must let me go," she said, and again her back slipped away.

He was forced to come back to serious business: he explained to her that the moment had arrived, the next election would certainly bring him back to the national assembly, and then it was a foregone conclusion, you might say, that he would be in the Government. It might appear sanguine on his part to think and speak thus, but they wanted a representative of the shipping interest and as Chairman of the Sailors' Commission he had acquired a thorough knowledge of that subject, he said.

"Fancy, then you'll be a Minister!" she said.

"In all human probability," he replied. She didn't suppose he was inventing this, did she? Not to mention that the papers had called him the coming man and he had heard one or two things behind the scenes. And then he asked her and threw all his

heart into the question: would it not be a very suitable thing if she shared his fortunes and became the wife of a well-known politician, of a Cabinet Minister?

No answer.

He talked on, but now there was just a hint of letting her understand that he would not be utterly at a loss even if he didn't get her, he had made a good many acquaintances; but she, Fröken Olsen, was his only thought. He took it for granted that her parents, Consul Olsen and his wife, would have no objection to make, in marrying him she would not be an ordinary man's wife. Then what was her answer, might he hope?

And at last she answered: "I can't say anything about it."

"You mean at any rate that you will think it over?"

"Oh yes. I'll think it over."

"How long?"

"I don't know. Don't let's talk about it any more now."

"What if we wait till after the elections?" he asked.

"How long is that?"

"A month or so, five weeks. I want to take you with me when I go back to Christiania, I need you and I love you. We will have a home of our own and invite people to see us, people with influence, politicians. And while I remember it: we'll buy two of your brother-in-law's paintings, I said we would and I stick to it; but you must be the one to choose them. Then shall we say that we'll wait till after the elections?"

"Very well."

She promised nothing, nothing at all. When he was gone she stayed where she was, reflecting. Fröken Olsen had nothing to complain of, nothing was ruined, she had still escaped perdition, indeed her lot was not too bad. She might go so far as to take a husband at whose coming all the flags in town would be flown; if so, who could show a husband to equal hers?

She heard steps on the stairs and thought: Is he coming back?

A far greater surprise was in store for her: in walked her father and Consul Johnsen, the Double Consul himself, who had never set foot in her home till now; he had come to sell his country house to Chandler Olsen.

XXIX

THINGS WERE more serious than people thought with the Double Consul. He had never concealed the fact that the *Fia* had gone down uninsured; on the contrary, he had proclaimed it from the house-tops, and now the consequences were arriving, he and his right-hand man Berntsen had all they could do to keep off frightened creditors. They conferred and discussed and did this, and that and the other, the Consul had actually insured the vessel by telegram after she had gone down, but this he had done of his own accord and Berntsen had instantly and also of his own accord cancelled the mad idea. Berntsen was a pearl.

But Berntsen the pearl was also human. In the midst of all the fuss and bother he kept his head clear and had a human thought to spare for himself.

There were the townspeople, standing in little groups at the corners, talking of the catastrophe: now the Double Consul himself was ruined, the man who had never been in difficulties before, who could afford everything he wanted, who was the town's central figure in weal or woe, who gave right and left, who had the big house with veranda and balcony—now he was bankrupt. What did they know about it? They all knew it. Hadn't a man come yesterday from Christiania to dun him? Hadn't another man come today from Hamburg to dun him? And wouldn't a third and a fourth come, wouldn't one come every day? People knew well enough that it was ruin.

The effects were felt far and wide, every inhabitant of the town was involved in it, the Doctor felt it in his practice, the Shipyard closed down. Henriksen of the Shipyard lost his head and said: "Go home, boys, I can't carry on any more!"

And now that the town was in convulsions it appeared to be

time for its people to reflect and reform. They had had a serious warning some years before in the form of a certain mail robbery, but of that they had taken no more notice than of a calf with two heads; the people had been the same as ever. But now? Would not such a shock, such an earthquake as the bankruptcy of the Double Consul be sufficient to cause an awakening? Then what were folks made of! Why, the local paper printed an appeal to people to turn religious, and the women at the pump discussed this program so that it reached every home in the town; but it seemed to make no change in them, on the contrary, if any shade of difference could be seen it was for the worse. And actually by the same mail boat as the gentleman from Hamburg another visitor arrived in town, an old lady and an old acquaintance, the dancing mistress! The world was unfortunately mad. Just now, when people ought to be religious and scarcely recognizable for piety, the dancing lady came back to work upon a new generation. And the people remained just the same as ever.

But what about Berntsen? Well, Berntsen shut up the shop as usual and walked with ordinary steps past one group after another and simply was not the least depressed. And that is the way a man ought to behave who is right-hand man to a bankrupt employer, he ought to attend to his master's interests and look as if he had a good stroke of business coming off. And by the side of that he can spare a human thought for himself.

Right-hand man Berntsen did not go straight home to his attic this evening, far from it; he went direct to C. A. Johnsen's big house and asked to see Fröken Fia. He knew very well that the Consul would not be at home, that was the last place to find the Consul when anything hit him. Strange voices were heard from the drawing-room, Heiberg's Alice was there, Constance of the Shipyard, even Fröken Olsen, even the Postmaster's daughter, the one who served in the millinery department; they must have come so that Fröken Fia might not be entirely alone in her trouble.

As for that, Fröken Fia, the Countess, was quite capable of showing that if she had trouble she also had culture to bear it; at the moment she was entertaining the ladies with an Indian fairy tale she had been reading and thought of illustrating.

She showed right-hand man Berntsen into the little room known as the cabinet, and sat down to listen to him. Now of course Berntsen had had more than enough talk with the Consul himself of late, and he did not care to go to Fru Johnsen, who had never taken much notice of Berntsen in her days of prosperity. So he had no one left but Fia. That must be how it was, what else could it be? And there was no doubt he was just giving her an account of the position, the bad fix the business was in, faced with ruin; what else could he be explaining? It did not take very long though, not many minutes, and when Berntsen left the house and Fröken Fia returned to the ladies her face was as calm and smooth as before. The ladies regarded her with mournful looks; Berntsen must have brought tidings of some fresh disaster, what else? But Fia showed fortitude.

Yes, now Fia showed fortitude in a high degree. It probably annoyed her that these girls who were so far beneath her presumed to show an officious compassion; she smiled at them, she did that.

Seeing which the ladies smiled back and were happy: "Good news?" they asked.

"Well, what do you think?" replied Fia. "He proposed to me."

Muteness.

"Who? Berntsen?"

Fia nodded with a broad smile: "My father's shopman."

For the next minute no one knew what to say. Heiberg's Alice wished to show herself genteel though she was not rich; "Servants take great liberties nowadays," she said.

And to this Fia replied: "Yes, one has a great deal to put up with."

But in the face of such countess-like airs Fröken Olsen could not help reflecting a little. There might be limits to fortitude. Now here was Fia Johnsen, her father had had to dispose of his country house, he was not too well off; perhaps it was not so impossible an action on the shopman's part to appear at this juncture with an offer of hand and heart. "Well, what answer did you give him?" asked Fröken Olsen.

Fia merely looked at her with eyebrows raised and said nothing.

"I don't know that it was such awful impertinence, Fia. Berntsen is not so much older than you, he'll have a business of his own some day and his appearance is by no means ugly."

Fröken Olsen drew the prospect alluringly; it seemed she would have no objection to Fia Johnsen's making a not very brilliant match. But Fia only gave her another look; these Chandler Olsens were really in a class of their own! And to be sure, Fröken Olsen was not all elegance and refinement, no, she couldn't copy paintings and may not have been very strong on spelling, she had not read Indian fairy tales. But Fröken Olsen had a commonsense view of her own, she thought even Fia Johnsen should be married some day. She said: "Well, I dare say you have another, Fia. For I really cannot see that poor Berntsen was going so much too far."

That was one for her, right in the face.

"Oh, come now!" Heiberg's Alice rebuked her.

"I should have to be pretty hard up!" said Fia.

"Yes, that's what I say: you must have another somewhere."

To this there is no doubt the Countess replied with unwonted irritation: "I have ten others if I like."

Muteness. The four ladies seemed to think the figure rather high, and Fröken Olsen said: "Well, in that case—"

"Yes, that's so," said Fia with a nod. "But if I hadn't a single other I should not accept Berntsen. If I hadn't a single other I should accept no one from here."

"Oh?" said Fröken Olsen, pursing her full lips a little. You see,

she had a bird in the hand and he belonged to the town, but he might turn out good enough, ho! it was not out of the question that the town would fly its flags for him one day. But at this moment Fröken Olsen must have been jealously aware that her bird had circled about Fia Johnsen before flying to her, so what must she have suffered!

"You see, I've really been about a little and seen and heard a thing or two," said Fia. "My art is what interests me, and I am accustomed to associate with artists, not with the men of this town."

Well, that was too strong even for Heiberg's Alice, who had one of her own in the town, Reinert, son of the parish clerk; he was still so young, but you never saw such curly hair and dashing style, such wheedling ways! She had positively clung to the jaunty student in his last vacation.

Fia thoughtfully wagged her head and murmured: "My goodness, how my artist friends would laugh at me!"

"Supposing you took Berntsen?" replied Fröken Olsen. "My brother-in-law would not laugh at you for that."

"Oh?" asked Fia with curiosity. This began to interest her. Fröken Olsen's brother-in-law was not a nobody, but an artist with more and more of a name, a rising star. What could he have said, what did he think about her, didn't she paint well?

"He said you were altogether too refined; you couldn't love and you couldn't kick up your heels, he said. I don't know what he meant by it, but that was your nature, he said, and he was sure you would never get married."

Fia ignored these unpolished expressions and merely asked: "But what did he say about my work?"

"I don't remember. I think he said there was no fire in it."

"No what in it?"

"Fire. I don't remember exactly. But you were a cold nature, and all the artists thought the same, he said."

Poor Fröken Fia, this kept her quiet a long while. It was hard

on her, she was very subdued: "He hasn't seen my last copies from the Louvre," she said; "I believe I can go so far as to say that they have fire. And by the way he hasn't seen the illustrations I think of doing for the Indian fairy tale. I fancy they will open people's eyes."

When the ladies had gone she went to find her mother, for the first time properly troubled, sick at soul. Her mother had already gone to bed, weary with grief and the burdens of the day, and her daughter's visit was not likely to revive her, was it? What did Fia come for just now?

Of course she came in nicely and politely, asked if she was disturbing, if her mother would rather she didn't stay, it was only—it was really nothing—

"What is it, Fia?"

"No, you're not well now; it wasn't anything, it will do another time. But I *am* an artist, Mamma, am I not? and I'm not going to be dashed by a little criticism."

"What are you talking about, child; you've only had good criticisms, I thought?"

"Yes, haven't I? Oh, I'll show them! You shall see what I'm going to start to-morrow, Mamma, the best I've ever done!"

"Was Berntsen here?"

"Yes. Do you know what he came for?"

"I think I can understand."

"I'm sure you can't. He proposed to me."

To Fia's great surprise her mother did not rise up in her bed with a jerk and demand right-hand man Berntsen's instant dismissal; no, she lay where she was and it looked just as if she was reflecting.

"I suppose you know Papa has sold the country house?" she said.

"What country house?" Fia knew nothing, she had never heard of such a thing, she would have to get the bargain called off. Sold their own country house!

"To Chandler Olsen."

At this Fia collapsed upon the bed. So that was why the four young ladies had come this evening, that daughter of Chandler Olsen had brought company with her to witness the triumph! If Fia had not had her art she would have been bankrupt now, but she was rich.

"We talked it over, Papa and I," said her mother. "Berntsen advised us to do it, and we agreed that at any rate you should have something to fall back upon."

"I?" said Fia. "I have my art."

Mother and daughter discussed it. Oh, Fru Consul Johnsen had become a thoughtful woman, perhaps she saw through right-hand man Berntsen's manœuvre; altogether she was better able than before to guess at the motives of people beneath her. What about Berntsen? Had he not done what her own husband the Consul had done before him and what so many men did? We live in the age of human beings.

They discussed and discussed, but Fia no doubt was thinking of her own affairs and did not confine herself to worldly matters. The artists thought her a cold nature; was that the thanks she had for helping them? "I have helped them, haven't I, Mamma?"

"Yes. But that's all over now. The Chandler Olsens, the Consul Olsens, can afford it better than we."

"But they have no culture," said Fia consolingly.

"No, but they are so rich. Fancy, now they've got cut-glass finger-bowls!"

Mother and daughter smiled at this and it made them on the whole a little more cheerful. Fru Johnsen lay there with her yellow face and her sorrow and adversity, but still she could say: "Well well, we shall see when Scheldrup comes; perhaps he'll know what to do."

"Oh yes, don't be afraid, Mamma! No, you see, these artists didn't find so much to criticize; it's only that I lack a little fire, they think. But I'll undertake to show them; oh, they shall see!"

She continued to talk about this.

There she was, Fröken Fia. She was now getting on in years, the peach bloom of her cheeks was no longer fresh, she was overripe, there was already something out-of-date about the lady. She had spent all her years without making a success, but at the same time without making a failure; nothing had been capable of turning her mind, she was impassible and charmingly sure of herself. That she had not gone astray was due to her not having gone anywhere at all. Why should she? She was so well behaved and so protected. Her love and her maternal instinct found expression in the painting of pictures, she had always been able to afford this occupation, she painted from no necessity either external or internal, but she painted. No one ever saw her grieving over herself, she never did amiss, she wronged nobody, was not extravagant, she spoke nicely, curtsied. She might have had occasion to enquire of the heaven above her and the earth beneath her: am I anybody? am I anything? Likely that she should ask it!

Fröken Fia—perhaps the weight of her own advantages was too much for her, perhaps it was a burden upon her road. It is not good to be entirely free from distress, from anxiety about oneself.

"I a cold nature?" she said, rising to her feet. "And incapable of kicking up my heels?"

Both mother and daughter were now in a good humour and able to joke, the mother sat up in her bed and tittered; they had the same temperament and both were blissfully ready to forget gloomy reminiscences.

Fia feigned high spirits, ho! she kicked out a little as though she had some folly in her, quite a lot of it, and she gave little jerks of her elbow exactly as if she were amorously nudging someone beside her. It was not bad acting. She picked up her skirts and showed the whole of her white knickers; they were so fine and exquisite, so full of lace and ribbons, such a vision of

paradise, and now they were exposed to the light of day and Fia made a high kick with her left leg. It really looked as if in time she might hope to surprise the artists with her recklessness. "Ho!" she said again. Why yes, in reality she was a desperate female, a regular beast, she would show them! When she had kicked up her leg for the third time, wasn't that a good deal? Was it still not enough? Then all she could do was to neigh like a horse.

Oh, it was in truth a very seemly and innocent exhibition, but a sad one; these old maid's antics might have made a stove-pipe laugh.

"And where is Berntsen?" she asked all at once. "Has he gone? If you approve, Mamma, then why not? I'm in the mood for anything. He's probably waiting down below; shall I fetch him up again?"

She was not called upon to make the sacrifice; Fia might have spared herself her generous offer, fate allowed her the opportunity of continuing her old life, her elegant and decorative life, exactly as before, so why should she change it? For a man came to town who arranged everything, saved the business set the members of the family in their places again, relieved the town's convulsions—Scheldrup Johnsen came home.

Did he arrange all their affairs? Some he disarranged. Oh, that could not be avoided. Human beings push against each other and walk over each other, some sink to the ground and serve as a bridge for others, some perish; they are the worst fitted to resist the push and they perish. That cannot be avoided. But the others thrive and flourish. Such is Life's immortality. You see, all this they knew at the pump.

It appeared that Scheldrup Johnsen was not altogether gentle and lenient when he came tearing home from New Orleans; he had not an angry word for right-hand man Berntsen, but his father was called to account.

The Consul could not understand why *he* should suffer; he had

never heard of such a thing, was he to be severely blamed into the bargain! Why, he had expressly asked Berntsen not to forget the insurance.

"But how much had you got to remember yourself?" asked. Scheldrup.

It was not much use discussing the matter with so stupid a son, so callous and modern a son; he came from another world; sterling, he talked about; dollars, he talked about. He poked his nose into all his father's books, as though bent on finding mistakes in them; he was business all through. Hadn't the Consul a great many things to remember? Wasn't he the town's watchtower and amongst many other things Consul for two countries, hadn't he his reports to write?

But it was vain to attempt a defence, the Consul grew smaller and smaller in the encounter with his son; he hinted that he would realize. He had already assured Fia's future and sold the country house; he himself and his wife must manage as best they could, no doubt he would be able to get some agencies, an insurance agency—

A broad smile appeared on Scheldrup's lips and his father saw it. Offended in his dignity, he repeated that he would realize, pay in full like an honest man.

Scheldrup replied: "We're not going to realize."

"Yes," said his father, persisting in his self-surrender. "And being the man I am, I shall resign my posts as Consul."

"Not a bit of it!" said Scheldrup firmly. "We can't afford to lose any valuable assets," he said. For that matter he had now gone through the books; they were rather roughly kept here and there and that was a mistake, figures were not to be treated approximately, figures were something serious, something strict, don't joke with figures! "But the position is not even really bad, Papa, we should be fools to go and lose our heads. Let these prowling gentlemen from Christiania and Hamburg and Gothenburg and Havre come and see me in future!" he said.

"Do you mean that?"

"But on one condition: that you take a rest, Papa."

So at last his filial feelings were coming out, he understood that his father needed rest. And his father had no objection in the world to resting, he had had too much on his hands, his hair was nothing to what it used to be, his eyes were without lustre, his days without peace, his nights without joy. "But I can't just go and loaf about?" he said.

Scheldrup announced: "I want the entire management. You must rest."

To begin with Scheldrup made rude havoc of persons and things: he gave Oliver Andersen notice at the warehouse, he stopped the annual subsidy and the annual suit of clothes for the philologist Frank, Oliver's son, he dismissed the old hereditary woodcutter who had served in the home of Fru Johnsen's childhood for honour and glory and a silver spoon thrown in, he also terminated a certain connection with Henriksen of the Shipyard.

Again people stood in groups about the streets and made up their opinion about the state of things: there was no doubt about it, the Consul was dethroned and Scheldrup had taken over the management, they could see the effects of it everywhere, effects good and bad which were all discussed at the pump. Oh, how tongues wagged! There, now Fru Johnsen had got herself a little hat. She had always worn a big hat before, with a wide brim that flapped up and down as she walked, yes, it was just as if that hat had hinges all round. But now she had got herself a hat pretty nearly the same as the one little Fru Consul Davidsen went about in and that didn't cost much. Of course it was Scheldrup's doing and what hadn't he a finger in? And then he'd settled that mysterious affair at the Shipyard too. You see, that was a little arrangement that had come about between the late Fru Henriksen and the Consul one time, a long time ago, while the lady was still

alive and kicking and not much more than thirty. That was how it was. But now the Shipyard was closed down, that was the worst of all the arrangements, the Shipyard was not working any more, Kasper and all the rest of the workmen were unemployed and had nothing to do but keep their wives off each other.

Scheldrup took an active hand. When the representatives of the foreign creditors came they were shown into his office where he sat by himself; the gentlemen from Gothenburg and Havre were not with him long, he arranged with them, bowed them out and sat down again. What had he said to satisfy them? It was not what he said, but what he did, that made an unforgettable impression on the gentlemen: he wrote out cheques for their claims. There you are—one miracle after another! The steamship *Fia* stood at two hundred thousand crowns in the firm's assets, and where could Herr Scheldrup Johnsen find this million to balance the loss of the ship? He must have had the devil's own connections outside in the great world.

He was more active than this. It came to light that the worthy Scheldrup was not by any means business all though—was he now? His heart could run away with him. He went one afternoon to pay a call on the Chandler Olsens and came away an engaged man. So wasn't he taking an active hand? It came about so naturally, neither Scheldrup nor Fröken Olsen looked either to the right or to the left, but settled it on the spot. The lady didn't even ask him to behave like a gentleman; it was simply the sequel of a boy and girl love affair, both got what they wanted, both needed it. It was just at the time when Lawyer Fredriksen was busy holding his election meetings; he had no chance of appearing on other battlefields and preventing a break-through, so it was bound to turn out as it did. However, he got elected—in one place. But he was thrown out in the other. Probably Lawyer Fredriksen had never made such a false calculation: the more important of

the two elections went against him. He could have stood a political defeat—till next time; but Fröken Olsen's decision meant a loss to him for life. It was no use fumbling his arm around her after the event, it was no use thundering with his voice. What was any use?

He moped for a time, a week's time. Oh, Lawyer Fredriksen was by no means a lost man, his vitality was great, he would get on—out of the way there! He did not aspire to supreme mastery, he aspired to the position and honours of a Storthing politician, he aspired to affluence, to wealth on a small-town scale, for that he was fitted. Would he not then attain such modest objects? He was a good deal already, Chairman of the Town Council, Storthingsman, Chairman of a never-ending Commission, in a while he would be Minister of Justice. What a career! Who would have imagined such great things for him a few years ago when he was shabby and unemployed, when he could not keep himself in cigars, nay, when he sometimes had to ask Barber Holte for credit for a shave: "I've forgotten to bring any change, put it down till next time!"

Fröken Olsen had played him a shameful trick, but he would get along. Lawyer Fredriksen will always be able to get along, he will get more Commissions to sit on, he will get a wife with money, he will pay Barber Holte every time in future. As Minister of Justice he will do what has to be done in the Department, more is not necessary, more is not expected. One of his old cronies on the Storthing benches will ask him some question or other, refer to some administrative business or other; yes, the Minister of Justice promises to give the matter his attention, and the Storthingsman thanks him. Oh, the Minister of Justice is an able man, he will give some matter his attention, no doubt of that, he is a man of energy, a leader, his Department despatches business both great and small. Anyone who fears Minister Fredriksen may do something out of the common does not know him; he will do precisely what is necessary, that is what he is made for.

He has become one of the wheels of the country's machinery; when the other wheels go round, he goes too. He is geared low, he is not to go round fast; he must just not stop.

He will be missed when he dies.

XXX

SO ONCE again Oliver had come in for a nice crack of doom: he had been given notice at the warehouse. He still went there and did his daily work, but when the notice was up he would be on the rocks. This was about the last thing anybody would have thought, my word! Oliver was profoundly depressed.

He went to Abel and had a talk with him. Whom else should he go to? The philologist Frank was one well skilled in tongues and a teacher of his fellow men, but he had not yet sent home the liberal assistance his father expected; on the other hand it was rumoured that he was regularly engaged to Constance Henriksen of the Shipyard. Well, how did that help Oliver?

Abel now ruled the forge, which Blacksmith Carlsen had at last made over to him at a reasonable rent; he had got the wonderful steam hammer which worked with petroleum, it was a grand worker and was just like having a boy in the place. Abel had plenty of orders and made good money. He was no miser who wanted to keep every crown piece for himself; he put some by for furniture, bedclothes, a chest of drawers; he went to Goldsmith Evensen and bought twelve grammes of gold. *What* did he buy? Gold. And still Abel could spare a two-crown piece for his father's pocket.

Now Oliver made not a scrap of distinction between his children; therefore when he was in need he did not go to Frank, who was absent, but to Abel, whom he could find every morning at the forge. And today it was a question of more than a two-crown piece; Oliver explained that Scheldrup Johnsen had given a cripple the sack, it meant his daily bread, and what was he going to do?

"Well," said Abel, turning it over; "I don't see what I can do but get married," said he.

That was the devil, and it can't be denied that his father stared when he heard it. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I've got everything ready and I don't want to wait for her any longer," Abel announced. "I want to have it settled."

Oliver did not catch his son's idea at the moment, but he was a father who could adapt himself; he dropped his own affairs at once and listened sympathetically to his son's: "I should think you wouldn't wait for her any longer!" he said.

"Ah, do you mean that?"

"I should think I did mean it! What is she and what are you? It's just as if you found a feather or a bit of down in the street, that's what she is and nothing more."

"Would you like to see the ring?" asked Abel. He fetched it from a drawer in the bench by the window, and it was something of a ring, thick and bright, heavy in the hand, gold. "I've just got it finished," he said.

Oliver was mute and incredulous, but he pulled no faces over it. At last he asked: "How much did Evensen make you pay for that ring?"

"Evensen? I made it myself!" Abel showed him the mould he had cast it in, showed him the filings he had taken off it, showed him the files that were all golden. "And here you can see the emery paper I polished it with, here are all the different rags, coarse rags and fine rags, and I used chamois leather to finish with."

It was all perfectly true, not a doubt of it; Oliver shook his head and said: "Lord save us, Abel, it's a treat to see the way you can turn your hand to things!"

And Abel was proud of his father's praise, but he dropped out the remark: "Now the thing is whether she'll have it."

"Have it?" cried Oliver. "Supposing the person won't have it, you just send her to me. You just do that. Not have a ring

like this? Feel here, it's double the weight of the one I bought for your mother in foreign parts. You mustn't talk so blasphemous!"

Nothing more was said about the father's daily bread, but in spite of that his visit to the forge had cheered up the poor fellow. It didn't take much to do that, merely the fact that Abel had not lost heart in the face of impending destitution was a support and a comfort. Abel lose heart? No.

He took hold of the handkerchief which was hanging out of his father's breast pocket; Abel wanted to borrow it, Abel had a smut in his eye. And when Oliver got back his handkerchief he felt it was heavier by a two-crown piece.

Then he left, did Oliver. It was strange how his spirits had been revived, this visit to the forge had done him good, he had money in his pocket again, tomorrow was Sunday, it would certainly be weather for rowing out—oh, the future had something for him yet! When he went home to dinner he brought some sweets for the children, in the evening he rowed out.

Night came and he did not return, next day came and he did not return; no, it was the usual thing, he let the boat drift, fished for his food, went ashore, cooked and ate it and went to sleep. There was nothing to compare with this wonderful lazy life.

The first morning brought a solitude of eternity over sea and islands; far away on the mainland stood a few telegraph poles, far between, he could just hear the church bell from a parish outside the town, it put him in a gentle mood, disposed him to silence. This morning did not invite to any kind of moral laxity, to oaths and blasphemies; no, no, the world was a lovely place, to be sure it was, and when he had eaten the remains of last night's fish he felt full and happy and said: "Thank God for the food!" That's more than most people say every day.

Not every morning is alike, this was Sunday morning with

prayer and church bells, there was a murmur in the air, the sea lay at his foot, it was his native land, his cradle, the swell came on towards him, swaying up and down, vanishing in foam on the beach. It was all fine. Think of it, once in his young days he took a ticket in a raffle and won a table-cloth. After that, another time, he salved a full-rigged ship and brought her into port. All this was the doing of Oliver Andersen.

He had had another sleep, it is good to eat and sleep. The sun was high in the heavens, it was so absolutely the day and the place for him, he would at last carry out his plan of rowing out to the bird rock far away in the steamer channel, today it should be done, there was certainly eiderdown in those little shelves of the rocks. "Ah well, in the Lord's name!" sighed Oliver and rowed off. Maybe his piety was somewhat calculated, as human piety is wont to be; at any rate he could not neglect his own interests. He knew that the mail boat had called at the town and gone on, so he would meet no one, he was alone in his business, without witnesses. What could witnesses do to him anyhow? Oliver is out fishing, Oliver has a right to that.

Oh, now as before, as almost always in the last twenty years, there is something not unlawful about Oliver's life, something on the border, occasionally a little outside.

It is not given to him today to steal eiderdown with his usual diligence and dexterity; true, he cannot pass the precious stuff without taking it, but he grabs it clumsily, filling his bag with all sorts, clean and dirty. Something is to happen which takes off his attention. Oliver's mind was always full of the fabulous, and the fabulous has never failed him yet. What is in store for him now?

Here are no birds in their nests, no eggs, the young are hatched out, Oliver has his best chance of acting. He examines the lowest nest, digs down to the bottom and finds paper in it—paper it is, letters, what can that be? Mail, letters with stamps on them, that's strange. He thrusts aside the layer of down and

picks up the letters; it is registered mail, there are opened envelopes with sealing wax on them, but cleared of money, there are registered letters which have not even been opened; he reads some of the addresses and recognizes the owners, people in town and in the country round about, he tries opening a registered letter and comes upon bank notes, opens more and comes upon bank notes—

Fabulous.

It took Oliver the whole afternoon to finish his work properly at the bird rock; he had grown grasping, he ransacked more and more of the nests he could get at, found now and then what he was looking for and collected it in heaps, he was getting richer and richer. He rowed away from the bird rock at dusk with his booty, rowed like a steamer, met nobody, had no witnesses. He put in again at the island which had given him a berth the night before.

From now till the day of his death Oliver's heart would beat fast at the memory of this adventure. At first he made the mistake of guessing that the letters came from a wreck. Then he remembered that the paper now and then had stories of dishonest postmen who emptied letters of their valuable contents and then threw them into the sea. Oh, but Oliver's brain was practised in dealing with shady things, he soon saw the true facts of the case, that these were the remains of a certain robbery of registered mail. Neither he nor anyone else had forgotten that great event, the Postmaster and his family had reason to remember it, Oliver himself recalled a roll of notes dating from that time. But whoever the thief may have been, whether Adolf of the sea chest, the one who called himself Xander, or the second mate, the Postmaster's son, or anyone else—what an ass he must have been, what a bungler, what a wretched beginner! Here he had the chance of a lifetime and had used it like a fool, stood on board in the dark and looted none but the thickest letters and then heaved the rest into the sea! He had

treated the precious plunder like a prodigal, behaved as though nothing were sacred to him. Oliver was scandalized at his conduct. Those dumb beasts the eiderducks were like sensible and instructed people in comparison, they knew how to preserve a treasure. Oh, the eiderducks are such wise birds, they lay the foundations of their nests with what they can find, they lay them with registered mail—

Oliver had no desire of food, no desire of sleep, he simply sat up there till dawn broke, then he carefully sorted his mail from the sea, a mail from Heaven and God, took out the notes and put them in his inside pocket, collected the letters and burnt them. Then he scattered the ashes and destroyed every trace. He himself had done well out of his fishing trip, that was so, but certain people might also feel relieved if they knew those letters were burnt.

Then he rowed home, rowed like a steamer. It was Monday morning, Oliver was slack after his excitement and did not say much to his family, but he was in an unusually mild frame of mind and grateful for what food was given him; he had money in his pocket now and could eke out his meal with sweetstuff. Then he went off to the warehouse.

In the course of the day he more than once crept behind sacks and barrels and counted his notes, smoothing them out and getting rid of the dog's ears. One or two customers came in and were sympathetic about his dismissal, they were sorry for him; Oliver replied: "Well, God will find some help for me!"

His heart swelled within him. There he was again in his warehouse with money in his inside pocket, feeling more and more of a man; his clothes were worn to rags, but his character was picking up, his whole being was hardening, he underwent a resurrection. No wonder, Oliver was now on top, he stood on a peak, visible only to himself; his feeling passed into arrogance, he was positively cock of the walk. Not that he thought of going to the hotel, playing the rich Englishman and demanding

carriage and horses for drives in the neighbourhood—no overdoing it. As he went home to dinner he did indeed have a fancy to look in at a couple of shops and pay off old debts, but a gleam of sense made him change his mind in time. Good Heavens, his riches were not so immense after all, he couldn't buy an annuity with them, no indeed; but there was enough of the blessed stuff to put heart into the poor fellow, to give him courage to growl; he stamped his crutch on the floor and said to himself: "I'm not going to let him throw me out of the warehouse, I'll go to the Consul!"

The first thing he did was to bring home all kinds of dainties, oh, hitherto unheard-of num-nums in tins and silver paper; from that hour pears in syrup were no longer a fairy tale and a legend to the Oliver family; the result was he astonished these people who had never been round the world, and Petra chaffed him, saying he must have found some treasure on his last fishing trip. He was to do greater marvels yet: he was not so cautious in his expenditure as during his former period of affluence, he bought various articles of clothing for everybody in the house, he stood himself a new suit and a tie with silver fringe into the bargain. Possibly it was a girl's tie, but he couldn't imagine it on any neck but his own. Later in the day he went to Goldsmith Evensen, who also sold hymn books, spectacles and musical instruments, and there he bought a bright brass horn, a clarinet, for the wall of his parlour. He said to Petra: "Let me see that you keep it bright!"

With that he had cut a fine dash and got his spending done; now there was still the Consul. He boasted in advance that he would go to him: he had a word to say to that man, that gentleman, he intended to make himself known, to tell him who he was—

Meanwhile he postponed the day and the hour, he affected to be ruminating over something and not to have made up his mind. Meanwhile again he received a letter, it was from Lawyer

Fredriksen, Minister Fredriksen; he wrote that now he was a Minister he wished to liquidate all his affairs in his native town; Oliver must therefore pay his overdue debt or leave the house he was living in.

Then Oliver ruminated no longer, he only waited till closing time, then left the warehouse and went to the Doctor.

Oh, maybe he had dirty work on hand, but he went to the Doctor.

The Doctor's room was as bare and unprofessional as ever, no dead man's skeleton, no microscope, but a half-finished portrait of the Doctor himself hung on the wall. There he had sat some years ago to a budding painter, a mad young fellow, who wanted to paint a picture of "The Physician"; it had been a distraction in the Doctor's empty life, it had actually impressed him as an honour. But one day the painter had thought himself entitled to interrupt the work in order to go to a neighbour's house and paint a decoration on a frock-coat; the Doctor was not going to stand that, no, that wouldn't do, thanks, one isn't a fool, one isn't a nobody. The Doctor said: "Take your picture with you and go!"—"Burn it!" replied the painter.—"Burn your own rubbish," said the Doctor; "I'm not your charwoman!"—This must have irritated the young painter and he answered: "It isn't rubbish, it's like you; it's half-finished, so it's just right for a portrait of you!"—At first the picture had stood upside down in a corner; but by degrees the Doctor's opinion of it seemed to change; he was not so contemptible as to miss seeing the sting in what the painter said, there might be something in it, a nucleus of truth. He belonged to a generation which was sceptical of everything except science, he acknowledged a faith in Nature's conformity to law, in the theory of the brown eyes even; but his generation knew no cowardice, it could look Life's emptiness and desolation in the face without wincing. The Doctor certainly considered himself a

learned man, a small-town superman, an accuser and chastiser, but at the same time he could perceive in his best moments greater contemporary figures than himself, an Englishman, a Frenchman, some Germans, a Dutchman; oh, the Doctor was by no means stupid, he was quite prepared, as far as that went, to acknowledge that he was a little unfinished and to hang a half-painted portrait of himself on his wall. It was an action that had something of true greatness in it.

What did Oliver want with him?

To be examined.

What did he want examined?

Hips and so on. He wanted to have his injuries examined and get a certificate.

Why? No, the Doctor wouldn't do it. Oliver might have consented when the Doctor asked him, now it was all bosh. Go home again!

Oliver was surprised. What was the meaning of this? Could the Doctor do without his hips? He explained that a crack of doom had fallen upon him and his family and that a written certificate from the Doctor would be of service to him.

No, go home again.

Oliver put his hand to his inside pocket and said he would pay for it, with a sailor's extravagance he declared he was willing to give a hundred crowns for it.

"Have you a hundred crowns?" asked the Doctor.

"Yes, I have."

But as he put the question the Doctor blushed slightly at his own words. What was he thinking of? Did he call to mind a certain promise of a diamond ring for his wife, a youthful promise that was still unfulfilled? The slight blush spread so delicately over his face and improved his looks. Putting on his spectacles, he asked: "You caught an oil barrel in your loins and got ripped up, didn't you?"

Oliver was rather cornered by his old yarn: "It wasn't ex-

actly an oil barrel, you see. No, it was a derrick and I fell astride it and got smashed. Afterwards I was operated on."

"Undress yourself!"

Oliver undressed, the Doctor felt him, pommelled him about and said: "What do you want to know? That you're not a father? You know that without my telling you." And he could not resist a touch of greatness and infallibility: "For that matter it has never been any secret to me."

Oliver was watching out and asked to have it in writing.

Why? No, again the Doctor refused. "How many children has your wife?"

"We have five children—she has five."

"My attestation would be too late now, the brown eyes have lost their fire in this town. Dress yourself again!"

"It wasn't for the brown eyes I wanted it. No, not at all. We have two children with blue eyes."

The Doctor pricked up his ears, that old small-town gossip, but he was not going to be the one to ask questions, on the contrary, he said with some show of repugnance: "You needn't acquaint me with your family affairs!" Nor, indeed, could Oliver have told him anything new; the Doctor had certainly heard a few things already and could afford to feign indifference now. He wrote a certificate and read it out, Oliver nodded that it was sufficient and put his hand to his inside pocket.

The Doctor stopped him: "You don't presume to offer to pay me for this piece of work, do you?"

"What?" asked Oliver, flustered.

"No."

So Oliver left.

He went to Scheldrup Johnsen and asked for a few days off.—"By all means!" replied Scheldrup Johnsen, letting him understand that his presence at the warehouse was quite unnecessary in any case. Oliver went home. He announced to his family that he intended to make a journey, and when his family

clapped their hands in astonishment he puffed himself out and gave them to understand how infinitely trivial a journey was to him, who was used to sailing all over the world: "I'm only going to pop over to Christiania," he said, "to see a certain Minister of State," he said; "I've got here a paper in my pocket and I'll have to show it to him." Oh, how dark was Oliver's speech and how he boasted! He went to Abel and said: "If there's anything you want from Christiania in the way of machines and things, just you let me know!"—"Well," said Abel, "if you could buy me a steel rule. They're not to be had here and I'm pretty hard up for one at the forge."—"You shall have your rule," said Oliver with importance. "Of the best quality," he said. "I think a father can do as much as that for you!"

So Oliver set out.

He came back a few days later and was in grand spirits. Yes, for he had got all he wanted out of his tormentor, that was sure.

He had tried to find his son Frank, as a matter of course, Oliver made no distinction between his children and he tried to see Frank too. It was in vain, Frank was a master at a big school somewhere; he had done with the University, they couldn't teach him any more there. But in the next place Oliver brought messages from Minister Fredriksen, a fine man, chatty and kind as ever; now he had written off the debt on the house. The family were wild with joy. Oliver went on, with his new straw hat on one side: "It didn't cost me anything but a few single words!" The family were full of curiosity, full of questions. Oliver was dumb.

It was not the first time Oliver had been able to bring off something in an awkward situation, he had his own way of setting about it, a peculiarly foxy look which he raised slowly from the very floor, accompanied by words which were full of hidden danger. At these times there was a depravity about him, a perverse baseness, from which his opponent was bound to shrink.

He had not resorted to abuse this time either, nor shown a knife. What had he said? Trifles. That night in bed he yielded to his wife's uncontrollable curiosity and repeated his conversation with the Minister of State; oh, that couple, that Oliver and his wife, they both discussed the affair unblushingly; now and again Petra praised him for his apt answers and said: "Ah, you know how to do it!" And Oliver swelled with pride.

Well, what had he said? He explained that he would consider it right and proper if the Minister privately let him off the debt, if the Minister of his own free will made him a present of the house, him and Petra and the children—

"Children? They're grown up, aren't they?" said the Minister.

"Not all of them. Not the two with blue eyes. One of them is still small."

"Oh?"

"Small. Almost nothing, you might say. And the Minister has so much to think about now with the King and the Government, the Minister ought to write off the house.'

"Write it off? No."

Oliver produced a doctor's certificate that he was a maimed man. Well, the Minister read the paper and gave it back and couldn't see what it had to do with him. "No," replied Oliver, "that's because the Minister has so much to think about. That's why he ought not to think any more about the house in his native town, but write it off for ever."

"No, why should I?"

Oliver raised his eyes from the floor and looked at him and answered: "Because otherwise the Minister will have something else to think about!"

That is how their talk had gone.

Did it then begin to dawn on Minister Fredriksen that his reputation was in danger? To put it plainly, he couldn't very well have a dispute about a house with a maimed man and a

cripple, what would his old constituency say, what would his native town say! And he wrote a receipt.

For some little time Oliver revelled in his triumph and did not conceal the delight it gave him. He still had money, though he had spent a lot on his great journey, on clothes for the family, on the carpenter's rule, the clarinet, on sweets, one thing and another, but he still had money and his air was still that of a man who had recovered himself. But one thing remained unaltered: he was still under notice at the warehouse and was to leave directly. This was his great misfortune, this by degrees would bring him down and bow his neck.

So one day Oliver took upon himself a rotten and impudent job and went to the Consul with his doctor's certificate. To the Consul in person. It had gone so slick with Minister Fredriksen, Oliver couldn't help repeating the attempt; true, it was the last thing he could persuade himself to do, but if there was no other way—

He had never imagined he would sink so low, he would have spared Consul Johnsen any indiscretions, would have gone on shielding his gay brown eyes from being dimmed. What was he to do? In a short time he would be out of work, the Consul might so far admit an interest in the welfare of the Oliver family as to keep a warehouse job going for the cripple. What was Oliver in a position to do in return? Everything. He might be the Consul's screen; oh, there was no change in his devotion to his gallant chief, he could abandon his rights to him, be his dog, the guardian of his harem—

He went to the Consul.

It led to nothing. No, Consul and Double Consul Johnsen was not the same as of old, he was resting, was supplanted, his son had taken his power from him, the old watch-tower had fallen. It was apparent even externally that Consul Johnsen was now nothing at all—he was grey and wan and his coat was actually unbrushed. If one had not known better it might have been

thought that he alone of all the townspeople had followed the paper's exhortation and turned religious. Of course he was still Consul for two countries and wrote reports to his Governments, he had the same rotundity of stomach as before—but what else? Now it was nothing but Scheldrup and Scheldrup, people passed the father on their way to the son without even mentioning their business; in fact, latterly the Consul had heard people speak of him as plain Johnsen of the Wharfside, nothing else. That was how they were. What's become of the crew of the *Fia?* they would say. True enough, the lads themselves had been away for ten years at a time, but at any rate their families had always drawn some of their pay until this day; now they were gone, sunk to the bottom of the sea, and when all was said and done wasn't it the fault of Johnsen of the Wharfside? At first the Consul tried to give reasons, to offer explanations, but after all what was the use of combating such ignorance? They did not even allow him to have his say, they answered back, they grumbled. The days were gone by when one could be master merely by virtue of a heavy gold chain on one's waistcoat.

Fortune had been with Oliver in Christiania, here at home it failed him. The Consul listened to him, it was almost pitiful to see how scrupulously the Consul listened to him, feeling more and more helpless, so much so that Oliver could not even bring himself to produce the doctor's certificate. "I have not treated you and yours badly in the past," said the Consul; "now I can't do anything for you, I no longer have a voice in anything, let us hope for better days!"

Oh, those were sad words indeed for a faithful servant to hear.

Oliver's next idea was to go to the scoundrel, to this Scheldrup himself, and show him an honest clenched fist. Would that be any good? Without a doubt. He was not Oliver Andersen for nothing. But now the blessed inside pocket was getting so thin

and his courage and fortitude had shrunk to such a degree that he let one day go by after another without coming to a decision, and then one evening Scheldrup told him to deliver the key to the warehouse to Berntsen in the shop.

So Oliver was not to come back to-morrow morning, he was finished.

It was no more than he had expected, but still it came upon him with paralysing suddenness; he hadn't even had the enterprise to see about a little cheap coffee and groats while there was yet time, so from now on the family would have to suck their fingers.

A month went by, an evil month, Oliver was cross and intractable, he said no more than was strictly necessary at home and preferred loafing about the streets, as at any rate he had good clothes. There was no comfort in the bosom of his family, the children were growing pale, the clarinet hung unpolished on the wall, even Grandmamma could not help puffing and sighing, she was clean out of coffee. Oliver cut in all at once: "Well, now you can get your coffee from the parish!"—"I'm so old now," said Grandmamma; "would to God I was under the sod!"

Then one morning the family was in rather greater distress than usual and they had not a warm cup of anything for breakfast. Petra came in from the pump and perhaps her spirits had been a trifle revived by other women, but Oliver was silent. He probably thought it was time for Providence to take a hand, but Providence seemed only to be occupied with the lilies of the field and all the hairs of the head which could not be numbered. Petra said, as though someone had suggested it to her out of doors: "I've a mind to know whether I should go to that Scheldrup and talk to him?"

Oliver made no answer to this. His cheeks had shrunk, never had his face looked so slack and uncannily lifeless as now; he cared for nothing. When he came in again at dinner time he

threw himself and his crutch into a chair and asked scornfully: "Wasn't it you that was going to see Scheldrup?"

Poor Petra was unprepared and could only answer: "Well—?"

"But you didn't go?"

She recovered her composure and started objections: Today? She couldn't very well go on the spur of the moment, she would have to wash some of her clothes first, she was so untidy.

But next day, when she had got ready and was nicely dressed and all, Petra was a deuce of a fine woman again with a lovely figure; Oliver might have noticed the curve of her lips, swinging up and down like a gallopade, Oliver might have given her a kiss; but he was lifeless. What reward had she for looking pretty!

Her visit to Scheldrup Johnsen led to nothing, she found him a rock, a man of wood; Scheldrup turned her away, he had no use for Oliver, he couldn't afford to keep him any longer—we won't say any more about that! Oh, Scheldrup can't have forgotten a certain thumping box on the ears that Petra had given him in his youth; now he was an engaged man and a mean fellow, he was not like his father the Consul who could be open-handed at times.

So there was nothing else for it; Oliver had to work up sufficient rage in his soul to go and see Scheldrup himself. A fateful step, which was to recoil upon him in bitter tribulation. For it availed him nothing to practise his old procedure with dark threats and a sidelong glance up from the floor; Scheldrup was one of the hard, modern sort with callous feelings. To fancy that this gentleman feared a scandal was a mistake, unless indeed he had something to gain by it; in this case he could feel quite safe, he had his Fröken Olsen whatever happened.

Oliver was bound to come off second best, he went the wrong way about it and lost his balance, he shouted. "Hush!" Scheldrup warned him sharply. Oliver flung his precious doctor's certificate

on the table, and in his turn Scheldrup Johnsen took up the paper and read it, whereupon he asked: "What's the meaning of this?"

"I am not a father," said Oliver.

Scheldrup asked with a laugh: "Well, what the hell's that got to do with me?"

This business man had no appreciation of the desperate fate that confronted him, and perhaps he had but a superficial impression of the infamous baseness of the cripple's words; he was sniggering all the time. Oliver collapsed into his usual cowardice; he said everything he ought not to have said, mentioned his five children, began to repeat himself and talked about brown eyes, oh, fine eyes, brown—

"Get out!" said Scheldrup.

"Brown eyes—"

"Well, what of it?"

Oliver had lost all his self-possession, but this obstinate refusal to understand made his insolence blaze up again: "Beware how you laugh! Who is it that has brown eyes in this town—?"

"I!" interrupted Scheldrup, laughing still louder.

"No, not you, you know that well enough. What you have doesn't matter. But what certain others have—"

"Now look here," said Scheldrup, getting up; "it's no use the Doctor trying it on this time either; take his paper and go. I'm not joking now."

XXXI

BEFORE MANY days had passed it was rumoured in the town that Oliver had not merely lost a leg but had suffered other injuries and that he carried a doctor's certificate that the children were not his. What was there then left of him? The rumour reached Oliver's ears through Mattis the carpenter.

This, too, this ignominy on top of all the rest! How had the closely kept secret been revealed! Can any secret in the world be kept? It leaks out through the walls, the paving-stones talk of it, all dumb things become vociferous, a young business man flings it out perhaps with a laugh for people to pick up as a good joke.

Mattis the carpenter was instantly grieved for having suspected an innocent man of Maren Salt's child, he was so sincere about it and so awkward, he wanted to put it right again and watched a chance of shaking hands with Oliver in the street. It was an incredible scene, Oliver couldn't guess what it was all about.

"Well," said Mattis, "you see, I wanted to shake you by the hand. And I want you to excuse the way I've been." He spoke as cautiously as he could and in fact he carried it so far that for a long time he was quite incomprehensible to Oliver, who suspected no mischief. Oh, that Mattis, there he stood, an odd fish, an absurd and honest fellow; he overlooked the fact that Oliver had wronged him, done him out of a pair of doors, swindled him out of a gold ring, nay, out of Petra herself in a way; he was simply intent on making his excuses, he had had no peace since yesterday when he heard how it was with Oliver—

"How is it?"

"Why, that you're maimed and operated."

Oliver stared at him and said at last: "Ah, you know that, do you?"

Why shouldn't Mattis know it? The whole town was talking of it, Maren Salt had come home from the pump with it yesterday, it was being spread abroad with details and fresh additions, not all too tragic, there was also something comic in it, something fundamentally comic. And then that Petra, making her children by herself, it wasn't every woman could do that, he he!

Mattis didn't exactly rub it in, but he showed compassion on the maimed man and dropped words to the effect that it was sad the way life had dealt with him. Or perhaps it was all lies?

Oliver stood there with bent head; for the moment he was at sea and did not know whether to deny or admit the state of his case. He gave in, threw over all his gameness and said: "No, there's not much lie about it."

At this answer the carpenter seemed suddenly relieved, as though some obstacle had been removed for his personal benefit, whatever it might have been. Was he thinking at that moment of something entirely private? Then he said to Oliver: "Well, well, poor fellow, you've had great misfortune! But I'll tell you one thing: nobody knows what'll happen to any one of us, we're all in the hands of Fate. The other day the kid had got hold of the matches and was just setting fire to the shavings in the workshop. He might have burnt himself to death!" Mattis chatted on, he consoled Oliver, called him poor fellow and did what he could. And to jump from one thing to another, he told him, he was just starting to make a bed for Abel. He came today and ordered it, he wanted it finished in a fortnight.

"Oh," said Oliver, "for Abel?"

For Abel. He was going to change his condition. It was perfectly wonderful how fast the young people came on and were grown up right before our eyes. What were you to say to that! But if that wasn't enough, it was just the same with people on in years, they were just as much in the hands of Fate, said Mat-

tis, pouring out his twaddle all the time. As Oliver did not answer the carpenter said straight out: "With shame be it spoken, I myself am going to change my condition."

Oliver could manage to drop his own affairs and listen to those of others; he asked in surprise: "You?"

"Yes, you may well ask, but now it's certain sure," the carpenter nodded. "What was I to do, will you tell me that? Maren won't give up the boy, and I, like an ass, I've got a bit used to him. I haven't got so terribly used to him, not at all, but when a kid sets fire to the shavings he'll get burnt up, we all know that. And he's toddling about round me all the time, and on Sunday he takes me by the hand and says "now we're going out." He's a strange fellow. Not to say that I can't do without him, but Maren won't let him go either—

Another long rigmarole, and Oliver asked: "So it's Maren you're going to marry?"

"What am I to do?" replied the carpenter. "Yes, it's Maren."

But, curiously enough, when Mattis the carpenter left him, it didn't look as if the prospect of marrying Maren was such an utterly gloomy one, he seemed to be in a hurry to get home. Perhaps a burden had been lifted from him, a weight from his mind, God knows. Can it have helped the carpenter over the worst of the business that at any rate Oliver had nothing to do with Maren and her boy? That whoever it might be, it was not Oliver?

And there went the cripple on his way home. Of course, there was none that did not get out of his way, that did not take cover as he approached, he was so marred, so egregiously impaired, he was repulsive to his fellow men. Could he expect anyone to look at him willingly? His pendulous fat was terrible, his whole being was forbidding, his hopping along the street unbearable. He was incomplete even as an animal, a quadruped, and he was not only a cripple, he was a hollowed-out cripple, emptied. Once he had been a human being.

There he went limping along. Even Mattis the carpenter was relieved to be rid of him.

As he took the road past the Doctor's perhaps he suspected him of having betrayed his secret and thought of calling him to account. Oliver call anyone to account now? That was past and done with. He saw the Doctor at the surgery window and slouched off; perhaps indeed it dawned on him that he was on the wrong track.

He slouched on, all down the street; the Doctor stood at his window following him with his eyes. He was a sight, a problem, the Doctor could argue about him and appraise him in his own way. This limping devil had been struck by something, a vortex, a flash of lightning, he was ruined. At one time the wits of the town had called him the jellyfish, a nickname which was said to have originated with his own frolicsome wife; the Doctor thought it stupid. The jellyfish is not ruined. The jellyfish is like a vomit, a mass of matter, it has no outlines, no consistency, if you like. But it is a many-coloured marvel of a vomit, a miraculous poached egg. What is Oliver? He hops about on land, he is a curiosity, a rebus. What is wrong with his limbs anyone can see, there he goes limping, he is not even bodily present, it is only part of him you see limping there; what else is wrong with him the Doctor's servant girl has now heard at the pump. One day he was cut adrift from the common content of men's lives, summarily, by the slice of a knife; since that day he has been outside the ranks of men, has lost his reality, has become a fabrication. Are these words too strong? How so—is he not destroyed? Very well, kindly examine him again; his emptiness is uncommonly flawless, it is peculiarly complete, his misfortune has intensified it, has turned the one-time sailor into something which is nothing. He perished, his extinction is a masterpiece, it was so amazingly well performed and with a purpose.

Stop a bit. Since he is alive, he cannot be quite blotted out; he is a remnant, straddling with crutch and wooden leg, one could

make a rune out of him, a Hebrew character. Why has he been spared actual death? Ask human providence! What was the idea, was this man to be nothing but an unsuccessful attempt, a rough sketch of destruction? He is a remnant, this remnant has its remnants, come and fetch them, he has one leg left, he can talk—

Once he was a human being.

So much of him was left that he still had courage to wrestle with life. Well done! He managed it by means of tricks, he lied to save his skin, played the man, put himself into trousers. To cover his accident he invented the yarn about an oil barrel; he cloaked the accident in lofty dignity and called it fate. He had to rehabilitate himself by a fraud; in passing himself off as other men, as commensurable, the poor fellow was compelled to use his own standard and persuade himself to believe in it. Perhaps it gave him his own little share of happiness, at all events he had no other. Tricks all through then? Tricks all through. But no bad trickery.

Now everything had come to light, the trickery was exposed, the trickster unmasked, the Doctor's servant girl had heard the most unmentionable things at the pump, Petra had been visited by the moon and then had babies, he he. But Oliver was always the boss, he had ruled his warehouse in the sight of all for twenty years and played the man. A calamity like his would have made anyone else retire into himself, seek solitude, seek God, what else was chastisement for? But Oliver? No. It could only be callousness. The Doctor's wife brought the gossip from the pump into the parlour, and the Doctor said: "That's a good joke; can't people grasp his want of resignation after coming to grief? Didn't he fall foul of his God? Did it cost him some trouble to come to terms with his adversary?"

There stood the Doctor, following the cripple with his eyes; he muttered to himself, recalling the language of his brave young days, his view of life had undergone no change: An Oriental in

his fat and his sterility. But was he even that? He was a thing unknown to biology, an animal with wooden limbs. What did it help anyhow to put him in that state? It only made him bigger. An invalid, if you like, but a veteran. He stood upright all the time, on his one leg, on his pin, he was nothing less than a Stylites. Ho ho, such was human providence!

And Oliver disappeared at the end of the street.

Oliver went home. He noticed nothing unusual about Petra, but of course she knew all. As the tone was nothing out of the common his spirits came to life again, he felt that he was hungry and in the mood, saw food on the table which perhaps was not meant for him, but there was much to excuse his throwing himself upon it. It was cold porridge. To prevent Petra making a shindy he suddenly told her that now at last Mattis was going to change his condition.

Petra must have seen through his stratagem and didn't give in at once: "What, you're taking all the porridge," she said. "You're a nice one!"

Silence.

But after all Oliver's news was great and noteworthy and Petra asked: "Have you been talking to Mattis?"

"Yes."

"Who's he going to marry?"

Oliver was silent a reasonable time and then replied: "Who's he going to marry?" and was silent again.

"Well, it isn't anything that concerns me," said Petra, and returned to the porridge: "Now the dish is empty; what'll we do for supper?"

"He's going to marry Maren," Oliver then said.

It took Petra a little while to believe it, to grasp it, she was comically jealous and abused Maren, spat upon Maren: a woman with one foot in the grave, an old trull with a child! Oh, it was a stroke of luck for Oliver to be able to bring such news home, it

diverted his wife's attention from everything else, he heard nothing about his own troubles.

This was not the only time, he was left in peace for days and weeks, he escaped answering questions, There seemed to be a providence, a higher dispensation in it; every time there was a fear that his dishonour would come up for discussion, something or other happened to help Oliver out of his strait. The first thing was that Abel got married. Nothing less. A great and solemn event which occupied the whole house of Oliver.

Abel got married at last.

He didn't get just the one he wanted, but a girl outside the town, a big, gentle girl, Lovise, a farmer's daughter. She was about his own age, they were a young couple, but both had good arms and were broad across the chest. Abel might have done worse, that mad and careless fellow. He had talked about getting married all his life, but the day his father came and told him he was out of work he made up his mind to act. He surprised his father at the moment, but this time he had no doubt struck the right idea.

The ring was not destined to adorn her for whom it was made. No, Little Lydia wouldn't accept the ring when he brought it, she had bought one herself with a red stone in it, she wasn't going to wear a plain ring.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Abel. "I made it myself and I don't believe it'll come unsoldered."

Well no, she thanked him, but she wouldn't have it; people might easily think she was engaged. For that matter Little Lydia had no time to spare just now, she had to go to Policeman Carlsen's again to practise the piano; she bustled about the room with a certain haste and stood in front of the glass titivating herself. The heels of her shoes were gloriously high, they looked as if an architect had built them.

Abel pleaded his suit according to his habit, perhaps with rather more fear and bashfulness than usual, and of course he talked a lot of nonsense too and shifted between jest and earnest. What did she think about it, they were both old enough and Abel had the forge; now he would like to know?

Know what? She didn't understand him, not a bit; Abel explained, and now he showed his delicacy by not beating about the bush.

Little Lydia told him to stop, she was quite comfortable and didn't want to change her condition; she was working for the millinery establishment.

All right. But Abel wanted to have it settled now. He had a steam hammer, he had bought lots of things for the house, they could live at his home in the old rooms, Mattis had made the bed—

This positively seemed too much for Little Lydia, as if she were quite shattered by what she heard; she leaned over and looked at him.

"Are you looking at me?" asked Abel.

"Yes," she said. "I don't understand how you can think of such a thing! How you can fancy I'll say yes!"

They talked again about it from one side and the other, she could hardly help laughing at him, she said. She came to the point and in the end he received a very plain answer; in fact she could not avoid letting him know what kind of father and mother he had.

So there was nothing to be done, and he held his peace.

As she was not a heartless girl, but a girl like any other, she began talking harmlessly about other things: now her brother Edevart was on his way home, he had written from Boston. To this Abel replied politely and held his peace again. Well, she announced, now she was ready and would have to go. Abel got up and made for the door; so as not to appear quite crushed he

even tried to be jocular again and said: "Well well, I can come back another time!"

He did not come back.

He strolled out along the country road, the lightest man in the town went with heavy steps. No doubt he wanted to walk off some of his sorrow and misery, he increased his pace, urged himself on more and more, as though he would lose a fortune if he did not hurry. Oh, and he must have been a little hurt too, a little furious.

He stopped before a farm by the road-side. This farm brought back a memory of his childhood: he had once been here as a little squirrel and sneaked a jacket that hung on a clothes-line, had hinted at a little food and been given none, had finally asked if he might buy a cup of coffee and had been refused on the pretext that he was too small. Poor Squirrel! But on that occasion he had promised to come back to these disgraceful people when he was big. Now he came.

A girl was standing in the yard; he knew her slightly, had seen her now and then in town and nodded to her, and it was evident that she knew him, she was rather too busy fussing with the grindstone, and she blushed; Lovise was her name. Of course it was not pure accident that Abel now stood confronting her, few things are pure accident; he stood there because he had been disdained elsewhere, he had come out of spite. And perhaps it was not pure accident either that young Lovise had come out just at this moment, at any rate she cannot possibly have thought it necessary to overhaul the grindstone so minutely. They fell into conversation, and as Abel was still disinclined to beat about the bush, he got a good deal said. She did not say much in reply, there was a becoming hesitation about her and her mouth was a nest full of smiles. This first time they settled one thing and another, the second time more and the third time everything. Abel was in a hurry to get the ring bestowed.

Now it might be thought that Abel was saddled with a terrible big family from the very start, wife, parents, two sisters and a grandmother; and maybe they felt the pinch for the first few weeks after the wedding, but Abel and the steam hammer did good work, besides which his father turned to and helped in the forge; he had a mighty pair of shoulders and was as good as a machine at filing. It worked quite well. Another thing was that Blue-eyes left the home, so there was one mouth less to feed. Look now, that little person Blue-eyes, she went off with her Drawing-pin to their own cosy cottage on the Heath and left Abel, that queer fish, crying in secret a whole day long. His father said to comfort him: "Well well, you've been good children to one another. And what children you've all turned out!" —"There needn't have been so much hurry about her," replied Abel.

It was not to stop at one sister, Abel had another, the Brunette, the one with the family eyes and the oval face. She might have stayed as she was for a while yet, thought Abel, but Edevart spoiled that; Edevart came home and took her, the sailor; he had been away for many years and now he came home, a strapping grown-up fellow, and took the Brunette. It was quite a little romance, by the way: in the first place she was still so young, hardly any age, and in the second Edevart encountered opposition both from his mother and his sisters.

"What of it!" he said in boundless surprise. "Supposing she has a mother like that and no father at all, what's it got to do with *me*?" They gave him further explanations and made the thing perfectly clear to him, but Edevart, he was a breezy sailor lad and in love, he didn't care a curse for gossip or anything he couldn't see with the naked eye, he said. They told him in conclusion that Little Lydia too had refused to enter that family and marry Abel. "But she was wrong there!" replied Edevart.

Nothing to be done.

At the wedding of course both families were present and Abel

met Little Lydia again. They even had a little chat. She did not ask him straight out if he had forgotten her, but she seemed to expect him to explain why he had not come back as he had said. There was meekness and melancholy in what she said and her tone was religious. Now and again she coughed and put her hand to her chest; he was to see that she was changed, she took life seriously and shed tears at night and perhaps actually spat blood and all. Of course she was got up in her best finery, in spite of her being so resigned and having tears in her eyes; oh, she was so young, she can't have renounced the world altogether; suddenly she drew from her bosom something fine and which had been hanging there and which Abel had taken to be lace and trimmings; but it was a handkerchief, and with it she dusted the toes of her shoes. Oh, Little Lydia could look after herself all right, anyone who had smiled at her moist eyes would have seen those same eyes turn hard and dry in an instant; she knew how to defend herself.

Edevart, man and wife, did not stay in the town, nor even in the country, they went to America. When Edevart saw how matters stood, that the home was full of grown-up sisters who did dressmaking and were smart, he cleared out. Abel did his best to dissuade the couple for his sister's sake, he told her that they would never see each other again. It didn't matter so much to him, he said, but was it right to the others? His artfulness was no use, his sister would go with her husband. "You don't think of how short-handed we shall be at home," he said reproachfully. Oh, that Abel, the whole household laughed him to scorn, all the grown-up women who were left.

But all these little marriages and everyday events were of no importance to the town and its other inhabitants, only to the Oliver family. To them they were great and momentous, and perhaps they happened for the best. Oliver could not complain, he had not been persecuted latterly, events crowded thick and fast and he was none the worse for them; on the contrary, he

had his meals regularly at Abel's generous table and received as before his little pocket-money. What more could he wish? He was not looked at askance, Petra said nothing. Truly, when all was said and done he was not so badly off, Oliver took heart and his power of resistance returned. When the blow fell on the Double Consul himself, a great man collapsed and threw up the sponge. The accomplished Postmaster received one night a thrust in his untried human thought and had been dumb and silly from that moment. Honest old Blacksmith Carlsen could not endure wickedness, could not endure being suspected of a son with Japanese pictures on his person; he had become like a child, he wept, mumbled, thanked God for good and evil and waited for death. Oliver was of a tougher sort, less delicate and sensitive, more easy-going, therefore made of the right human stuff; he could endure life. Who had been plunged deeper than he? But a trifling new prosperity, a lucky theft, a successful piece of roguery made him a happy man again. Was he to be found carrying palms? Oliver had been about the world, he had seen palms, they were not the kind of thing to carry about.

The days went by. He was left in peace at home, the street-boys did not shout after him, but Olaus the grazier was down on him when he had the chance. Oliver might now have been almost happy, but Olaus would not let him, he asked the cripple in the hearing of others about a certain doctor's certificate. Oliver went home and burnt the certificate amid curses. He avoided his tormentor as far as possible and was lucky enough to have a packet of tobacco for him in his pocket next time he met him. They had changed places so completely, Olaus was now on top.

"I feel sorry for you," said Olaus.

"How does that tobacco taste?" asked Oliver. "There's nothing queer about it, is there?"

After this Oliver might have feared that he had given away a packet of tobacco to no purpose, but he hinted nevertheless that it would not be the last; he was now earning good money in

Abel's forge and could assist a good friend now and then with tobacco.

Jörgen Fisherman came up and heard the rest of Olaus's spiteful talk; Oliver was doubly mortified by the presence of this particular listener, as he had shown off a good deal to Jörgen in days gone by, and now they were connected by marriage. Did Olaus show a trace of delicacy or tact in his indiscreet questions? Of course not. The last thing he said was: Why should Oliver wear any clothes? What difference would it make if he went about stark-naked? Then Olaus slouched off with an impudent swagger.

He left Oliver in a rare fury. Jörgen Fisherman said: "It's nothing to worry about what Olaus says!" But it seemed that there was something to worry about, the cripple had a wrathful look in his eyes and stood for a while working his jaws. "I'll remember him!" he said with a nod.

There was nothing to be gained by chatting with old man Jörgen; he limped away from him all at once and made for the main street. Luckily it was Saturday night and he was in his best clothes, he was not going to surrender. He stopped by the shoemaker's window and looked at the ladies' boots, he beckoned to anyone that passed and gave them his opinion; they were too high, these ladies' boots, they went so far up the calf, and Oliver smacked his lips over them and talked like a rip. All at once a boy flung a shattering nickname at Oliver, a laugh followed, and Oliver was dumb. "Ay, boots will soon be too dear for ordinary folk," said a voice behind him. It was Jörgen Fisherman again. Oliver took heart, he held forth on high boots again and smacked his lips; oh, but it was only a feeble reflection of what he had said to Jörgen before; what was the matter? he must have cooled down. In his desperation he called out: "Now I'm off to the dance hall!"

He fitted himself out, bought scent and poured it over himself so that you could smell him a long way off, bought sweets,

bought shredded tallow which he was going to spread on the floor. Lord save us, now he had something on, he was out for rapine and love and bride-snatching—out of the way there! God knows, perhaps despondency had made him brave, his life was so pitiable that it turned to a joke, he was sweating and pale, he took out his pocket mirror and rubbed his cheeks to make himself look pretty. Then he opened the door and thumped his way in.

The eyes of all seemed turned towards him: "Oliver," they said; "Oliver, ha ha!" He found a bench and sat down. The dance went on. "Pull in your crutch!" a young sailor-boy warned him as he waltzed past. "What's he yelling for? I didn't yell like that in a dance hall in my day," Oliver remarked to his neighbours. Presently he found someone to listen to him: "Ay, you must have been a real dandy in your time, Oliver?" they said. He wagged his head and told stories of the Alcazar in Hamburg and the Greenhorn in New York, all kinds of races and colours he had danced with and had for sweethearts; he had swung round Malays and Chinese, Indian and negro girls, an Indian girl was the sweetest thing he had kissed in his life—

Oliver was pale and sweating; it seemed to relieve the lazy man to affect so much exertion. They said to him: Well well, he mustn't think about such things any more! and he replied: Why not? A fiery nature like his couldn't stop, would never stop; they could see for themselves, here he was, he went to dance halls now. "Look here, boys, will you try some extra fine sweets?"

He gave his opinion about the dancing, it was nothing to what it had been in his time, that fellow who yelled couldn't waltz a bit, it wasn't the heels you danced with, but the toes, and you ought to hold up your partner so that she didn't tire herself to death. This was a wretched exhibition, Oliver felt inclined to step out himself and show them how it ought to be done.

At that his hearers laughed.

"Ho!" said Oliver, "I could do that all right. Look at the calves

of that one there, oh, she's got good calves, I should say; I ought just to have got hold of them, then you can guess what would have happened! Tahi-taho! Look here, go and spread this tallow on the floor," he said, handing over his bag.

"Tallow?" they said.

"Tallow. We always had some with us and used it when the floor was heavy and slow."

"Ah," they said and spread the tallow.

Well, then it went swimmingly, music and dance were merged into one, the waltz was kept going by those calves, by those pillars that carried it all round the room. It was extraordinary what an improvement the tallow made.

"You know what's what, Oliver!" they said, humouring him as long as they could because he was a cripple.

"They can't teach me anything," he replied. And this little appreciation made him break out with another "Ho!" and give himself airs and behave as if he could strike up a hymn of resurrection. "Oh, what a jolly evening! Look at that girl there, look at her big bust; go and tell her I want to talk to her."

The girl came. Oliver held out his sweets, polite to his finger-tips, and said: "Allow me, miss, a little refreshment!" The girl laughed, put her hand in the bag and wriggled away. Another came, several came, Oliver distributed sweets and told them, pale and dripping with sweat, what a fancy he had for them all. "You?" they said, howling with laughter at him. Oh yes, he had, a terrible great fancy. What did it matter if he was lame? He was just as good a man for all that. They ought to have seen how a hospital nurse in Italy clung about him and wanted to marry him. He never had a minute's peace from kissing and cuddling.

The dancing started again. Oliver looked exhausted, but he stamped his foot in time so that the floor shook, and as if that did not attract enough attention, he went further and thumped the time with his crutch. Some of the boys now began to take

offence both at his noisy thumping and because he took off their partners with his loose talk and his sweets. He was warned to sit still and not make such a row; it was no good, it only made him more frivolous: Oh, he was having grand fun this evening; the fact was, he was a regular dog after the girls, and they needn't make any secret of it if anybody asked them, because everybody knew it already. Allow me, miss, another little refreshment—

Ow!—there, a couple came down. There were howls and cries. Another couple tumbled over the first and there was a great uproar. What beastliness was this they slipped up on? Tallow. Where did it come from? The dancers strode across to Oliver with their clothes in a fearful mess of tallow and dust and swore in his face. The cripple answered that he always used to dance on tallow, they couldn't teach him anything in that line, either waltzing or reversing. They declared thay would make him pay for spoiling their clothes, they called him idiot and swine and everything they could think of. At this, as may be imagined, Oliver recovered some of his dignity and told them who he was, Oliver Andersen, that he had managed Consul Johnsen's warehouse for more than half a lifetime, that they ought to be ashamed and not behave like this to their betters—

"Out with you!" they shouted, and oh, what names they called him and how they reckoned up what kind of remnant of a man he was, an empty sausage-skin, an old wether. And he'd gone and poured a lot of scent over himself, he was rotten, he stank like a stable. Outside!

Of course his adventure was talked of far and wide and he scandalized the women at the pump, they couldn't understand why a poor broken wretch like him didn't choose to turn religious and go to church; whom else was the church for? But strangely enough, Oliver didn't hear about it at home this time either, it seemed that Petra had given him up entirely. True, he filled the room with his frightful scent, and it can't be denied

that Petra staggered back a pace or two to begin with, but there was no fight. A higher providence had stepped in once more: news had been received that the philologist Frank, the son of the house, had been provisionally appointed Headmaster of the big school in the town.

And at that moment no one came and told Oliver that he was a childless man. His children were nothing but pure invention on his part, granted, but he had them, during the whole of their childhood and growing-up he had been something to them, he and they knew each other, they called him father among themselves and to other people, and now Frank was returning to his native town, a great and learned man. Oliver was filled with pride over his son. Petra and Grandmamma would still have preferred to see him a clergyman, but there was nothing to be done about that. Oliver said with dignity: "What a son!"

XXXII

FLAGS WERE flying here and there in the town, at Chandler Olsen's, at the Double Consul's, in fact at all the Consuls' and at Henriksen's of the Shipyard. It was in honour of Scheldrup Johnsen and Fröken Olsen, who had been to Christiania for their wedding and were to come home today as a married couple. The mail boat was already sighted when one more flag was hoisted, on Consul Heiberg's brig, which was loading train-oil at a corner of the quay.

There was already a crowd of people on the quay and more were coming. Of the Consuls the only one absent was Davidsen, that wily small tradesman who always kept out of the way of the great ones. The Magistrate and the Doctor were not there either, but Frank, the young schoolmaster, had put in an appearance. He was newly married to Constance Henriksen of the Shipyard, but his wife was not with him. Frank was not the least of those on the quay, he possessed philological superiority over the whole town, the whole coast town; a great man learned to excess in foreign grammars and languages as a school subject. He stood well to one side, by a mountain of oil barrels that were to be put on board the brig; as he had on the new suit he was married in, he could not go too close to the barrels; on the other hand he wanted their shelter on the windy quay. He was sensitive to draughts. His father stood at the other end of the quay and did not force himself on his son. Oliver knew how to behave correctly.

Oliver was again on the up-grade. He no longer held an exalted position at the warehouse, but he was at the forge in company with Abel all day long, sometimes he was filing iron and occasionally he rowed out and took whiting in the bay. "My

son the master blacksmith," he would say; "my son the headmaster," he would say. He leaned back upon his sons and enjoyed the benefit of their respectability.

He was not so badly off and was contented, if only fate would leave him alone he would not complain. It goes without saying that the small boys in the street did not shout after the father of such a person as the Headmaster, it goes without saying too that Oliver never again went to the dance hall and made a scene. The only one he had to fear now was Olaus the grazier, and even he seemed to have suspended hostilities. Ay, truly, the days went by, one after another. Nor was Oliver the least of those on the quay, there were many lesser men than he. All these good people here, what were they? Ordinary folk, a class, the commonplace great ones of a small town in starched linen. Oliver was something apart. In this place where all were pretty much alike he must be regarded as something different. A victim of life's disastrous forces, if you like, chewed and spat out, shanghaied, but with an immortal life-impulse within him. The local paper might reprint its program and urge the advisability of taking a course of religiousness, they were doing that in other places, folks needed it and the time was ripe for it; in short, they were to begin at the end. Oliver began nothing any more, it was not his business to begin anything, he stayed where he was put, human thought did not crush him, the women at the pump did not convert him. Naturally Life, Fate and God were deuced lofty questions and mighty necessary questions, but they were solved by folks who had learnt to read and write, what had Oliver to do with them? If a brain like his took upon itself to inquire into such things it would turn giddy, and then Oliver would not be able to keep his work going, enjoy food and sweets, be fit for what he was. Leave it to the others to be more than they were!

Yes, he was contented, you could see it in his face. He stood fairly erect on his leg and his wooden leg and seemed to have

got powerful belongings at his back if he chose to make use of them. And all at once people esteemed him again: he's the Headmaster's father, they reflected.—

Then the mail boat came alongside. There stood the newly married couple by the rail, surrounded by their relatives; hats were raised ashore and afloat. Fröken Fia had not been afraid to make herself conspicuous by wearing something red, purple; she had also begun to interest herself in lapdogs and held under her arm a shaggy little dirty-white fellow with hair over his eyes and a blue ribbon round his neck. She was refined as usual and spoke in a subdued tone, a lady and a Countess without blemish; if she had a desire it was to be healthy and tenacious of life, to be allowed a long time in which to pursue her art and illustrate Indian fairy tales. As she is well brought up and harmless, Life will doubtless oblige her in this.

Her mother, Fru Johnsen, had returned to her senses and was no longer weighed down by grief. Her face was just as yellow as before, but she had got another big hat. Rumour had it that there was some monkey business about the steamship *Fia* and the bankruptcy, that Fru Johnsen had fancied herself poor for three weeks and was now just as rich again. She stood bulkily by the rail at her daughter's side; it was originally she and her dowry that had made a great man of C. A. Johnsen of the Wharfside, she was honestly worth a big hat, and here again she kept well out of the way of the Chandler Olsens, as though she would say: "Yes, it's true we're related to them now, but we don't see very much of them!" It was a shameful trick chance had played them when her husband went and lost his head and disposed of their country house to that family. What did those people want with a country house? They had been there once since they bought it, and they didn't drive there with horse and carriage, no, they went on foot, both Consul Olsen and his wife. It seemed the walk had been quite enough for them; the other day in Christiania they had made over the country house

to the young couple, it was their wedding present. What did those people want with a country house when they couldn't use it?

But there was Johnsen himself, the Double Consul, the only one of the company in a tall hat. He carried a plaid on his arm and came quickly, perhaps he had been delayed settling his bill, or he had had his little joke with the stewardess, devil trust him, the Double Consul was a great man with many irons in the fire. A fallen tower, he? A tower rebuilt. He was again worth a million or some other round sum; in Christiania he had worn his Danish ribbon in his coat. Was there really something in the report of monkey business with the *Fia* and her insurance, and what did it consist of? In any case Consul Johnsen had lived to see better days again, he was no longer resting, he must once more have had something to say for himself and other people. Once in a fit of reflection this man had looked up the old Postmaster to find peace; on a later occasion and in a far worse strait he had gone up the back-stairs to old Blacksmith Carlsen on the same business; after that no one could call him indifferent, he had taken his course; but it had not helped him. And then as time went on he escaped from his tight place and no longer needed help. What should he do with it? When he thought of the Postmaster and his modesty he could smile once more. The Postmaster had searched and searched for peace; he had found a little star and walked by its light, it was not a strong light, not sunshine and clear daylight, but it was enough to distinguish things by. A great thing to be easily satisfied! Consul Johnsen for his part did not search, it was far too much trouble, he would just inquire where peace was to be had in the market. And here he stood on the ship's deck, on top again and free from care, ho, he looked as if he could stand three or four more disastrous bankruptcies. A deuce of a fellow, that Double Consul, he must have found some means of putting a stopper on his pushful son and keeping him within bounds; "we" he said, talking of the

business, "my clerks" he said. And indeed a sudden change had taken place in people's behaviour to him, they looked up to him again and did not walk past him; after all it was by no means the son, but the father they had liked and paid attention to all their days. He had their own qualities, was ordinary like themselves, an easy-going person without seriousness or steadfastness, but Number One of the dozen, a great town worthy, rich and round, no doubt he would soon get another *Fia*—

And Consul Johnsen was the only one to call a greeting to those ashore. He could do that, being the man he was. "Do you see anyone to take our things?" he said to Scheldrup, and all at once he went off again. Perhaps he had forgotten something in his cabin, or he wanted to say a last good-bye to somebody. Devil trust him.

There at last was Olaus the grazier coming along the quay and he came like a man. Had he overslept himself today or had he been playing cards up to the last minute? He picked up the gangway and threw it aboard with a crash, the horse that was to drive the young couple out to the country house shied, but Olaus took no notice, he greeted the sailor on duty with a few forcible words: "There, make fast the gangway, can't you, and don't stand there like a boneless louse!"

Olaus had just been on a couple of days' spree and was not afraid to assert himself. And one of Olaus the grazier's sprees was a very different thing from an ordinary communion with wine in church; he drank what he was capable of. He now came down to the quay gloriously full, oh, blissfully crazy, erect, smoking a short pipe, hungry maybe, but obstinate and strong. He addressed people loudly and lustily, his language was rude and his throat was full of r's. What did he say? His words were plain enough, they did not stray either to right or left. He pretended not to see Scheldrup Johnsen on board and expressed his opinion of him: "Ah, so you're going to drive that Scheldrup out into the country?" he called to the coachman. "A nice fellow!

Ask him what happened about the *Fia's* insurance. Did you hear that? Scheldrup went and insured the boat himself, the cunning rascal, and put the money in his own pocket."

Everybody on the quay could hear it. It was no idle gossip, perhaps Olaus was not yarning at all, anyhow he gave voice to a rumour that was increasingly current. What was said about Scheldrup was by no means incredible, since it was he who had really managed the ship the whole time, a thing his father was quite incapable of doing, so might not Scheldrup have paid an insurance premium? He was capable of that. This would explain at the same time Scheldrup's coming home, taking his father's chair in the office and writing cheque after cheque for the creditors. Finally it would explain his father's taking back his chair when the affair came to light. Oh, perhaps that was why Consul Johnsen had suddenly waked up and recovered the use of his limbs; he had put a stopper on his modern son, he had taken over again as much as he wanted of the management. Nothing stirs a man so much as a victory.

The newly-married pair went ashore with their arms full of flowers, got into their carriage and drove away bowing, drove away to married life and honeymoon. Olaus was moderately silent. One after the other the wedding party left the ship, but this was too boring for Olaus, he left the gangway and went to the fore-hatch to look for goods. A few cases were put ashore. Olaus had one or two more flippant remarks to spare; as usual, there was no actual malice in him, but he was bold as brass and irresponsible, determined to give his hearers a shock with his outspokenness and make them laugh.

Now there was Frank, the new Headmaster, standing in his corner, lean and full of learning. Olaus addressed him: "Look out you don't dirty those oil barrels!" he cried. As he was a witty dog this time everybody sniggered. Oliver heard this remark, his disrespectful shout to his son, and limped a few hops nearer as though to take his part. His foxy look had come

over him and he seemed to entertain certain feelings for Olaus.

But Olaus was goaded on by success and continued: "You're standing right in my lodgings, don't you know that? Yes, that's where that Olaus the grazier and I sleep at night under a tarpaulin. If you'll come down here tonight I'll find room for you too!"

More disrespect.

Frank put his hands behind his back to show his indifference and walked slowly along the quay. He never answered except to give off learning, and he didn't give off learning on a public quay.

Olaus wouldn't let him go, he sent a laugh after him and said: "Ah, you bet I think a lot of you!" He caught sight of his father, of Oliver, and called to him, told him there was the son, Petra's son and the moon's. Oliver heard it and looked down at the ground. All the same, Olaus had something to say for Petra, praised her, he had known her since she was a kid, a pretty creature all the time, he said, much too good to come to grief. Then she got married to Oliver and that was much the same as being a widow for good and all: "Dear bless you, Oliver, you're not fit to talk about. I can't help feeling sorry for a poor chap like you, only fit to thread needles like a woman. But Petra—"

Here Olaus saw the Doctor coming along the quay, and in his drunken state he at once dragged the Doctor into his ramblings, he spared nobody: Petra wasn't like the Doctor's wife who wouldn't have any children; no, if she couldn't get them at home she went out into the town and got them. That was how it ought to be, he didn't care what they said at the meeting house. Did they think it was right that womenfolk oughtn't to have children? Hell to that! Were they to do like the Doctor's wife and cry and howl them away? Howl me here and howl me there and drop her down to the bottom of the sea, she didn't deserve any better! "Wasn't that so, Doctor," he called out in his insolence; "didn't you have to go round with a rag and wipe up her tears